Annual
Subscription
in North America
$45

BELARUSIAN REVIEW

Quarterly Information Bulletin (ISSN 1064-7716)
Published by Belarusan-American Association, Inc.
a fraternal nonprofit association
Managing Editor: P.O. Box 10353, Torrance, CA 90505 USA
TelFax: (310) 373-0793; E-mail: BelReview@aol.com
http://www.belreview.cz/

Vol. 13, No. 2 Summer 2001



Boundaries shown on this map are those of the Republic of Belarus, and do not include the entire Belarusian ethnic territory parts of which extend into neighboring states.

EDITOR'S DESK

The OSCE: A Thorn in Lukashenka's Side

Frustrated over the lack of progress in democratic and economic reforms and the blunt disregard of human rights in Belarus, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), with the concurrence of the government of Belarus, set up in September 1997 an Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) in Minsk led by Hans-Georg Wieck, former German Ambassador to Moscow. The AMG's mission was to facilitate the development of democratic institutions in the country, monitor the progress and report the results. A dialog between the opposition and the government was to serve as a means to get the political and constitutional crisis resolved.

One of the main objectives to be achieved by the dialog process was free and fair elections. The first test came during the April 1999 local elections, which the AMG found had not been free and fair. The next scheduled elections were for parliament to be held October 2000. The OSCE, supported by the European Union and the USA, was to work with the government of Belarus and the opposition to prepare a set of criteria that were to guarantee free and fair elections. These included: respect for human rights and an end to the climate of fear, opposition access to the state media, a democratic electoral code, and granting of real power to the new parliament.

The AMG, said Wieck, "stands for dialog and for the peaceful solution of the political and constitutional conflict, a concept that has not been adopted by either side." In his analysis of the political situation in Belarus, "The Role of International Organization in Belarus" of March 1999, Mr. Wieck admitted that "the dialog turned out not being very successful in the face of the government's attempts to manipulate it and the opposition's fear of being exploited for the benefit of the government." In his words, "[The AMG has been] criticized by the opposition which supposes that the Group is serving as a fig leaf for the government; it is criticized by the government for nonobjective reporting."

Seeing the unwillingness of the Belarus government to follow the OSCE criteria, Western governments refused to send their election observers. In their stead, the AMG trained and deployed local observers, who reported a series of serious violations and the AMG declared the elections not free and fair. As a result the Western governments declined to recognize the new parliament as legal and decided to continue their recognition of the 13th Supreme Soviet that Lukashenka disbanded and replaced with his own hand-picked "national assembly."

The presidential election has been scheduled for September 9. The Western powers decided to extend the same set of criteria to this election, stating that if the criteria are met and the election is free and fair, they would extend their recognition to the new president. In preparation for the presidential election, the AMG initiated a training of 14,000 domestic observers. Mr. Wieck reaffirmed on April 11 that his group is going to cooperate with domestic observers, and that neither Belarusian legislation nor Belarus' international accords prohibit the OSCE group from such cooperation.

Lukashenka declared he would run for the presidency and that he doesn't need any observers. He called the observers, a foreign-paid "army of bandits and collaborationists." To block their activity, he declared war on the

AMG by threatening to close the OSCE mission and to expel Ambassador Wieck from the country. A series of attacks by Lukashenka, the KGB and the state media followed, accusing Mr. Wieck of being a German spy working for the opposition.

On May 17, the Belarusian foreign minister threatened to expel Mr. Wieck if he did not stop his "destructive activity." The minister mentioned "foreign financing" of Belarusian election observers in last year's legislative elections as an example of such activities and said the government is concerned about Wieck's attempts to organize "a network of domestic observers" for the upcoming presidential election.

In another setting, Wieck observed that he does not want to appear an enemy of the Belarusian regime, saying: "We are supporting a democratization process in which the authorities themselves are taking part. When the parliamentary elections last fall were being monitored by the domestic observers it was the opposition that protested, since they were boycotting the elections. So it is wrong to say that we work for the opposition. The society should simply know how the election processes are being handled."

The United States, the European Union and the OSCE came out strongly in support of Mr. Wieck. On May 10, Ambassador David T. Johnson, U.S. representative to the OSCE, told the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna that the United States strongly supports the work of Ambassador Wieck and the AMG in "implementing its mandate to assist Belarus in the development of democratic institutions and considers the pressure against and obstruction of the mission's work by the Belarusian government unacceptable."

On June 14, during a meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna, Josiah B. Rosenblatt, deputy chief of the U.S. Mission to the OSCE, said that the Belarusian authorities "also need to invite representatives of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to observe the elections and to begin to cooperate with the OSCE AMG and the NGO community in organizing a network of non-partisan observers that have free and unrestricted access to all parts of the electoral process, including all phases of counting and transportation of ballots." "The [electoral] commissions must be open to significant representation of all political parties and candidates, including those in opposition," said Rosenblatt. And on June 15, Philip T. Reeker, deputy U.S. State Department spokesman, said that the United States has consistently supported democratic development in Belarus. "Key to an open electoral campaign and process are the criteria set forth by the OSCE last year and Belarus's Copenhagen Document commitments. These criteria include an end to the climate of fear, equal access to the state media for all candidates, respect for freedom of assembly, as well as transparency and fairness in registration of candidates and functioning of electoral commissions." Reeker once again expressed the United States' full support of the OSCE AMG in Belarus and the ODIHR as they work to lay the groundwork for the democratic elections.

On June 11, the EU Presidency issued a statement in which it said: "The EU fully supports the work of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) working within its mandate, and will closely consult with the OSCE with the AMG and to co-operate constructively with Ambassador Wieck."

In the meantime, according to Belarusian independent news media reports, the Belarusian government informed Ambassador Wieck that he has to leave the country by June 20. The OSCE, however, objected to Lukashenka's demand. As of this writing, the diplomat is still in Belarus and saying he just continues doing his work.

It will be interesting to watch what the West will do if Ambassador Wieck is expelled and the OSCE mission in Minsk is forced to close. Certainly, Russia's position will weigh heavily on the outcome in this standoff. And who will be losers and gainers? Oddly enough, some in the opposition have been accusing Wieck of secretly working for Lukashenka and of furthering a union between Belarus and Russia supposedly to protect German investment interests in Russia.

Acknowledgments

Support in Creating BR: We wish to express our thanks to our friends who helped prepare this issue: Zina Gimpelevich, Paul Goble, David Marples and Jan Zaprudnik for contributing articles; Jamestown Foundation and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty for permission to reprint copyrighted material; Charter '97, International League for Human Rights, the OSCE and the U.S. Department of State for using their material; Alex Silwanowicz for helping with source material; Dr. Anna Bartul, Alice A. Kipel and Joe Pecevich for editing; George Stankevich for typesetting and distribution; and Vaclau Bahdanovich for reproducing the issue in Belarus.

Joe Price
Editor

FEATURES

Democracy Under Siege in Belarus

US Congressional Helsinki Commission Chairman Deplores the Political Situation in Belarus

Hon. Ben Nighthorse Campbell of Colorado

Mr. CAMPBELL. Mr. President, I wish to update my Senate colleagues on developments in Belarus in my capacity as Chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Helsinki Commission. The Commission continues to pay close attention to events in Belarus especially as they impact democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

May 7 marked the second anniversary of the disappearance of Yuri Zakharenka, the former Belarusian Minister of Internal Affairs. In 1999, General Zakharenka, who had been critical of Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenka and had attempted to form a union of officers to support democracy, was put in a car by unidentified men and taken away. He has not been heard from since. His fate is probably similar to other prominent Belarusian opposition figures who have disappeared over the last few years, notably Victor Hanchar, Anatoly Krasovsky and Dmitry Zavadsky. The Belarusian authorities have had no success in investigating these disappearances; indeed, there are indications that the regime of Alexander Lukashenka may have been involved. Opinion polls in Belarus have shown that a clear majority of those who are aware of the disappearances believe that they are the work of the Lukashenka regime.

These disappearances embody the climate of disregard for human rights and democracy that has persisted since the election of Mr. Lukashenka in 1994. That disregard has intensified following his unconstitutional power grab in November 1996.

Presidential elections are planned for later this year. Unfortunately, recent developments in Belarus do not inspire confidence that these elections will meet OSCE standards for free and democratic elections. Despite commitments made to the OSCE, Belarusian authorities continue to unlawfully restrict freedom of assembly and to beat and detain participants in peaceful demonstrations, as illustrated by the April 21 protest by youth activists. On April 27, Valery Shchukin, deputy of the disbanded Belarusian parliament, received a three month sentence for the dubious charge of "malicious hooliganism." And on May 7, police arrested opposition activists who marked the anniversary of Yuri Zakharenka's disappearance. The activists held placards reading: "Where is Zakharanka?"; " Who's Next?"; and "Where are the Disappeared People—Zakharanka, Hanchar, Krasousky, Zavadsky?"

Lukashenka continues his harsh assault on OSCE's efforts to develop democracy, characterizing domestic elections

observers supported by the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) as ûûan army of bandits and collaborationists." This is only the last in a series of incredible accusations against the international community, including far-fetched allegations that $500 million had been earmarked in support of the opposition candidates. On April 25, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Friemut Duve canceled his visit to Belarus to protest the denial of a visa to his senior advisor, a U.S. diplomat Diana Moxhay who had earlier served at the U.S. Embassy in Miensk. The visit was to have examined the difficult media environment in Belarus, especially in light of the forthcoming presidential elections.

I continue to have grave concerns that Presidential Directive No. 8, which imposes restrictions on assistance from abroad offered to NGOs for democracy building and human rights including election monitoring, could be used to block NGO activities and important OSCE AMG Group projects in Belarus.

These and numerous other recent occurrences call into question the Belarusian government's willingness to comply with freely undertaken OSCE commitments and raise doubts as to whether the Lukashenka regime intends to conduct the upcoming elections in a manner consistent with international standards.

As Chairman of the Helsinki Commission, I call upon the Belarusian authorities to conduct a real and public investigation of the disappearances. Furthermore, I urge the Belarusian Government to take the steps necessary in order for the presidential elections to be recognized as free and democratic as outlined by the March 7 Final Statement of the Parliamentary Troika. These are: transparency and democracy in the preparation and implementation of the elections, in particular the process of registration of the candidates, the composition of electoral commissions and counting of votes; equal access for all candidates to the mass media; refraining from harassment of candidates, their families and supporters; and freedom in carrying out their work for all those engaged in domestic election observation.

Source: *US CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Proceedings and Debates of the 107th Congress, First Session, Vol. 147 No. 64 (Senate Legislative day of Thursday, May 10, 2001)*

Zakharenka's Disappearance Remembered

Helms Commemorates Zakharenko Disappearance in Belarus

Following is a statement by Senator Jesse Helms, Chairman, U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

Today, May 7th, is an important day to remember and take note of the ongoing struggle for freedom and democracy in Belarus.

It is the second anniversary of the disappearance of General Yuriy Zakharenko, a former Minister of Internal Affairs. General Zakharenko resigned from that post to protes t the dictatorship of President Aleksandr Lukashenko and began the organization of a union of officers to promote democracy in Belarus.

General Zakharenko thereafter paid the highest price for his commitment to freedom in Belarus. On May 7, 1999, he vanished while walking home to his family. All available evidence points to dictator Lukashenko as the culprit behind this disappearance.

Indeed, instead of conducting an investigation into the fate of General Zakharenko, the Lukashenko regime repeatedly harassed the freedom fighter's wife and daughter, forcing them to flee Belarus. Because of Lukashenko, the Zakharenko family has not just lost a husband and a father, they have lost their homeland.

In remembering General Zakharenko, we should also honor all others, who, because of their commitment to freedom and democracy, have disappeared at the hands of the Lukashenko regime: Viktar Hanchar, Anatoliy Krasovskiy, and Dimitriy Zavadskiy.

These disappearances are a cruel reminder of Lukashenko's paranoid fear of a free society and his hostility toward Belarus' independence.

On this solemn anniversary, let us not only honor the fallen freedom fighters; let us reaffirm our commitment to support those still struggling to fulfill the dream of a free, democratic and independent Belarus.

Thomson Foundation to Train Journalists At Private TV Stations in Belarus

Belarusian journalists from a private television network will be trained over the next 18 months by broadcast experts of the Thomson Foundation, under a major contract with the European Commission.

The Thomson Foundation, an organization based in the United Kingdom that provides practical, intensive training both in the UK and abroad, has conducted training courses in Belarus in recent years. But the new program will be the largest the foundation has run in the country and will be part of a coordinated strategy to improve factual coverage by private stations.

Under the European Commission contract, the foundation will train journalists from the country's TBN independent television network, which includes 16 stations. A series of seminars, workshops and courses in news and current affairs production will be held in Minsk, the country's capital, and in the regions of Belarus.

Russell Lyne, a project consultant who will run the courses, said basic journalistic skills in Belarus need improvement, particularly in light of the presidential election this year.

International media watchdog organizations are very concerned about the media situation in Belarus because of the upcoming election. Media coverage of last October's parliamentary election in Belarus divided into pro- and antigovernment camps, making voters the ultimate loser, according to a special report produced by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR).

Belarus has a network of state-owned and private broadcasting stations, but the broadcast media continue to remain under total control of the authorities. At present, there are two state radio programs, which are delivered an average of 35 hours a day in mono and stereo modes. The Belarus state system, regional stations, and the main broadcaster in Minsk, make up the state TV system.

The TBN independent television network is a private terrestrial broadcast network that provides information to more than a million people in the country's 16 biggest cities.

Source: *This Week in IJNet, Issue #107, June 11, 2001* **(http://www.ijnet.org)**

EU Statements on Belarus

Following is an OSCE/EU statement, issued May 24, 2001, on the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) in Minsk.

Like the Chairman-in-Office (CiO), Foreign Minister Geoana, the European Union also confirms its trust in the Head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) in Belarus and his activities directed to the strengthening of the democratic process in the country. The EU supports the call by the CiO for sustained efforts to improve the dialogue between the AMG and the Belarusian authorities, other political forces and civil society in Belarus.

The EU strongly supports the continued efforts of the AMG to implement its mandate. The EU therefore remains deeply concerned about the pressure the Belarusian authorities have put on the AMG and Ambassador Wieck. The EU does not accept the Belarusian view that AMG is acting outside its mandate.

The EU will closely follow the process in the run up to the presidential elections this year, and urges the Government of Belarus to create political conditions for free and fair presidential elections. The EU once again stresses the importance of such elections for the future relations between Belarus and Europe. This would be a necessary first step towards normalized relations with the EU.

The associated Countries, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Turkey subscribe to this statement.

Following is a Swedish Presidency statement, issued June 11, 2001, on Belarusian presidential election:

Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on Belarusian Election

The EU would in response to the announcement by Belarus to hold presidential elections on September 9 like to reiterate its support for a democratic development in Belarus and underline the importance of free and fair elections.

As stressed on several occasions, the up-coming elections represent an opportunity for Belarus to improve its relations with the EU and the international community. The EU therefore asks the authorities to take necessary measures so that a fair campaign and, later on, election can be held.

The EU would in this context urge the Belarusian government to honor its commitments under the OSCE Copenhagen Document and refrain from interfering in the work of the political opposition and independent movements. Respect for the principle of freedom of assembly is here central. The EU would also like to remind the Belarusian government about the need for objective reporting on all candidates in the state media. Independent newspapers should be able to work under the same conditions as state-owned newspapers and not be subject to discrimination.

Democratic elections could be promoted by taking fully into account recommendations by the OSCE, for example as regards the implementation of the election law. In this context, the EU recalls that the right of Belarusian citizens to engage in domestic election observation is guaranteed by law. The government should therefore not counteract the building and training of domestic networks of non-partisan observers. The EU reiterates its concerns about decree no 8 and its possible implications on the activities of non-governmental organizations, in particular in the institutional building and training fields.

The role of the OSCE during the election period is of great importance. The EU fully supports the work of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) working within its mandate, and will closely consult with the OSCE during the election period. The EU expects the Belarusian authorities to up-hold a dialogue with the AMG and to co-operate constructively with Ambassador Wieck.

The EU is ready to engage in a dialogue with the Belarusian government in order to promote democratic presidential elections. The EU would be willing to take a first step in normalizing its relations to Belarus, should the election be assessed as free and fair by domestic and possibly also an ODIHR mission according to international standards.

The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, the associated countries Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, and the EFTA countries, members of the European Economic Area align themselves with this declaration.

Source: *The European Union On-Line* **(http://europa.eu.int/**

Statement by U.S.Mission to OSCE on Belarusian Presidential Elections

Following is a U.S. Mission to the OSCE statement on Belarus, delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Josiah B. Rosenblatt to the Permanent Council, Vienna, June 14, 2001.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The United States takes note of the presidential elections that have been set for September 9th in Belarus.

The presidential elections present Belarus with an opportunity to end its self-imposed isolation and return to its proper place in the Euro-Atlantic community. For this opportunity to be realized, however, the presidential elections must meet international norms for free and fair elections.

In this spirit, we call on the Belarusian authorities to immediately take concrete steps to meet the four criteria set by the OSCE Troika last year as well as to honor their commitments under the Copenhagen Document.

Free and fair elections consist of more than unhindered voting. There must also be an election campaign free of harassment and intimidation by the state power. The Belarusian authorities must end the climate of fear that makes such a campaign impossible. They need to release political prisoners Andrei Klimov and Valery Shchukin, who are both 13th Supreme Soviet Deputies; account for missing former Minister of Internal Affairs Yury Zakharenko, 13th Supreme Soviet Deputy Chairman Victor Gonchar and his associate Anatoly Krasovsky, and Russian ORT Television cameraman Dmitry Zavadsky. They also need to end the harassment of parties and NGOs, and allow the full and unhindered exercise of the freedom of assembly.

An election campaign free of harassment and intimidation cannot take place without freedom of expression and media. All candidates, including those from the opposition, must have equal and significant access to the state media. This is especially true of the Belarusian electronic media, which are monopolized by the state. The censorship of Russian television, which has reportedly happened twice in the last month, cannot be repeated. Harassment of the independent print media, including unfair tariffs for delivery, must end immediately.

Representative on Freedom of the Media Freimut Duve can provide assistance in addressing these media concerns. The Belarusian authorities should end the visa ban against Mr. Duve's senior advisor by immediately inviting Mr. Duve and his senior advisor to come to Minsk.

The electoral process itself needs to be fair, transparent, and democratic. Arbitrary disqualification of candidates on the basis of trivial technicalities, as was the practice in the October 2000 parliamentary elections, will undermine confidence in these elections.

Electoral commissions play a key role in ensuring that votes are counted accurately. The commissions must be open to significant representation of all political parties and candidates, including those in opposition.

It is essential that there be an extensive network of non-partisan observers that have free and unrestricted access to all parts of the electoral process, including all phases of counting and transportation of ballots. The Belarusian authorities need to begin to cooperate with the OSCE AMG and the NGO community in organizing such a network. It bears

noting, again, that the AMG's work through a domestic election observation network that began in 1998 and that first observed local elections in 1999 with no objection lodged by the Belarusian authorities.

The free and unhindered operation of domestic and international observers will be central in determining the view of the international community to these elections. The Belarusian authorities need to immediately invite ODIHR to observe elections, so that it can make proper preparations and offer its expertise without further delay.

The U.S. joins the EU in its readiness to move toward normalizing relations with Belarus if the presidential election is free and fair.

Thank you.

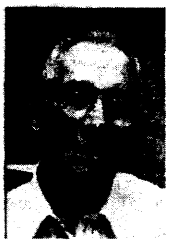
Source: *United States Mission to the OSCE, Vienna, Austria]*

THOUGHTS and OBSERVATIONS

BELARUS: In Search of National Identity (1986-2000)

By Jan Zaprudnik

'In my view, the problem of saving the [Belarusian] nation is directly related to the degree of national self-awareness.' - **Vasil Bykau.** *Belaruskaya Dumka* (#7, 1992)



Dr. Jan Zaprudnik

Geopolitical background

The geographical location of Belarus severely affec its geopolitics. In the pre-1991 period, the occasionally used nickname of the Belarusian SSR as 'the Western Gate of the Soviet Union' aptly reflects the country's geostrategic significance. One fateful aftermath of this position was the physical destruction of Belarus in World War II, including a heavy demographic loss ('every fourth one').

As a consequence, the number of Russians in the republic rose by about one million between 1945 and 1985. This increase was even more significant among the intelligentsia as a result of the disproportionately high destruction of the native cadres in Stalinist purges.

Another feature of Belarusian society as it emerged from the Soviet era was its deep-rooted provincialism and difficulty to think of itself as an entity apart from Russia. A telling incident illustrating this occurred in 1992 during a visit of Polish journalists to Minsk. 'The guests from Warsaw,' reported a newspaper, 'were quite surprised to have learned from Mr. Butevich [Belarusian minister of information - J.Z.] that the Polish ethnic minority is the largest in Belarus. When the minister was reminded that there are Russians, too [by far the largest minority - J.Z.], he said: "Russians are not a minority!" At which the Poles were sincerely astonished.' [1]

Many Belarusians still cannot think of themselves as self-sustained nation, especially in terms of economic relations, which entails and enhances linguistic and cultural attachment to their eastern neighbor. A group of international analysts agrees that 'Belarus is, in a geopolitical sense, a crossroads state' and that Russia remains 'the single most important external factor in Belarus's evolution.' [2]

As to the intentions of Russia regarding Belarus, they can be seen in the recently adopted 'Theses of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy,' where the issue of the national consciousness of Belarusians is also mentioned. The 'Theses' include the merger of the two countries' armies 'into a single system with a single command and control structure' and make the following projection: 'Since the processes of restoring national self-consciousness are being accelerated in Belarus, time is working in favor of the opponents of 'integration'. So, the unification process should be sped up.' [3]

There are indications that this process is being 'sped up.' During the last two years shifts at the top of the power in Minsk led to a dramatic increase in ethnic Russians occupying top positions in the Belarusian government where the country's prime minister, his deputies and heads of the power ministries, as well as a number of deputy ministers and the speaker of the lower chamber of parliament, are all Russian-born.

Gorbachevian opening:

Mikhail Gorbachev's program of restructuring, announced in 1985, elicited unexpected fruit the following year in the heretofore-silent Minsk - a collective complaint to the top Soviet leader from twenty-eight intellectuals on behalf of their national culture. The move was rather unusual for Belarus, a country that had been known for its subservient Communist Party leadership and silent intelligentsia. In their letter to Gorbachev, the twenty-eight signatories entreated the recipient to help save the Belarusians from 'spiritual death.' The threat of demise was seen in the fact that the national language, which the petitioners saw as 'the soul of the nation,' and 'one of the foundations upon which the statehood of the Belarusian people rests,' had been 'squeezed out of almost all spheres of life.' The writers of the petition pointed out that the discrimination against the Belarusian culture gave rise to a 'noticeable growth of national awareness,' which, in turn, 'is provoking a hostile reaction from the bureaucracy.' To prevent a rise in tension, the authors suggested that the Belarusian language 'must be protected by legislation.' [4] Indeed, such protection was given by the republic's Supreme Council in 1990 (see below).

Political Fallout of Kurapaty and Chernobyl

In the late 1980s, two major developments had a strong impact on the sense of identity of Belarusians -- the publication of an account of mass graves of victims of Stalinism in the forest of Kurapaty near Minsk and revelations about radiation fallout from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster that severely affected Belarus.

Kurapaty immediately became a generic symbol of Stalinist repression of the nationally conscious Belarusian intelligentsia which took place in the ideological and ethnic cleansing of the 1930s. The name 'Kurapaty' became a powerful catalyst for national awareness and a patriotic political movement. To speed up investigation of the crime, a civic group, called the Martyrology of Belarus, was founded in October 1988. Its spokesman, the most prominent writer Vasil Bykau, said that the inquiry into 'our losses and our martyrs' 'would be laid as a cornerstone in the foundation of our national consciousness.' [5]

In February 1989, a Minsk rally of youth groups 40,000 strong displayed such slogans as 'Sovereignty for Belarus' and 'Official Status for the Belarusian Language.' The Com-

suppression of national culture led to 'an emotional "explosion" among the intelligentsia.' [6]

The Martyrology of Belarus became the base for the creation of the Belarusian Popular Front 'Renewal' (BPF) in June 1989. Chaired by Zianon Pazniak, the BPF played a singularly important role in securing for the Belarusian language the status of sole official language of the republic (for a brief period of 1990-95) and proclaiming Belarus's sovereignty (27 July 1990) and independence (25 August 1991).

Another important factor that impacted the rise of the issue of national self-assertiveness was the revelation, toward the end of 1989, that over seventy percent of the radiation from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster landed on Belarusian territory. A public outcry and pressure for investigation of the Chernobyl cover-up had significant political and psychological repercussions. The republic's leadership was accused of subservience to Moscow at the expense of national interests. 'The Chernobyl tragedy has demonstrated,' wrote one critic, 'that the Belarusian people needs indispensably to raise its self-awareness. If our leadership had high national self-awareness, this would not have happened.' [7]

The National Idea'

With the advent of sovereignty and independence, much discussion has been centered around the closely interrelated concepts of the Belarusian 'national idea,' 'national consciousness,' and 'national identity.' In August 1992, an international conference was held on the subject of the formation and development of national consciousness among the Belarusians. [8] Soon afterwards the Academy of Sciences took upon itself the task of providing a 'scientifically grounded Belarusian national idea.' The daily *Zvyazda* published a series of articles under the heading 'We need a vivifying idea that will save Belarus.' [9]

The key element in this quest for a new conceptual base of nationhood was to be sought, obviously, in the spheres of culture and history. The multiconfessional and multiethnic makeup of Belarusian society, located between East and West, was now presented in a new light. It was found to possess a distinct type of mentality characterized by tolerance, humanistic values, the absence of extremist views, and having peaceful intentions toward its neighbors. Claims were advanced that Belarusian culture was a 'synthesis' of Eastern and Western types, without dogmatic collectivized Byzantism, on the one hand, or Western individualism, on the other. [10] However, public awareness of these qualities was low. Researchers found that only five to six percent of the population 'possesses the necessary knowledge of the history of [our] national culture.' [11]

Apparently not much has occurred during the last seven years. A poll conducted in March 2000 among 1,608 residents of Belarus, a country with eighty-one percent Belarusians, revealed an amazing lack of national self-awareness. The respondents were asked to say who, according to them, Belarusians are -- 'a separate self-sustained (*samastoynaya*) Belarusian nation,' or 'a branch of the triune Russian nation,' or 'other.' Only 49.8 percent said Belarusians are a separate nation, while 42.6 percent chose the category 'the triune (i. e., Russian-Ukrainian-Belarusian – J.Z.) Russian nation.' Five-and-a-half percent said they did not know how to answer.

Interestingly enough, 75.9 percent of the same respondents named the Republic of Belarus, in response to whose citizens they felt to be 'in the first place.' Russia was named by only 2.2 percent, and the USSR by 12.4 percent. [12] This shows the importance of statehood in the formation of a sense of national identity.

Since Lukashenka's critics accuse him of destroying the Belarusian character of the state and selling statehood itself to Russia, what is the position of official ideologues on the issue of a 'national idea'? It must be said that they do not shy away from discussing and propagating such a concept. For example, the editor of the newly-launched presidential monthly Belaruskaya Dumka [Belarusian thought], Uladzimir Vyalichka, wrote in 1996: 'We need as fresh air a consolidating national idea. The formulation of the latter is an honorary common obligation of politicians and representatives of the social sciences.' [13] Two years later, the journal devoted an entire issue to this subject, announcing that 'The intellectual elite is busy looking for a universal national idea,' since 'attempts to organize one's life according to an alien pattern and image are not successful.' [14]

There are, of course, differences between government and independent intellectuals and politicians in their understanding of the meaning and practical applications of the 'national idea' concept. While independent writers advocate full sovereignty and independence for Belarus, on the government side there is plenty of double-talk, inherited from the Soviet era, which allows officials to speak of Belarus's 'independence' within a union with Russia. Nevertheless, there is also a general consensus that the concept of national idea should be developed, and some see it as being already in motion. Here is one explanation of this phenomenon and an optimistic projection: 'Having born later than other "national ideas," wrote one of them, 'and facing hardships in search of historical justification and acceptance for the future, "the Belarusian idea" nevertheless has been alive and gaining ground. And for the young people who are growing up in an independent state, the ideas of the Belarusian people and the Belarusian state will, obviously, become something so familiar and natural that they will never be lost.' [15]

Language, Culture, Religion

Traditionally, to be Belarusian meant to be a Belarusian-speaker. In Belarus, as in Eastern Europe generally, the notion of nationality has been based on ethnicity. According to the outstanding Belarusologist, Academician Yaukhim Karski (1861-1931), author of the monumental three-volume monograph, Belorusy (1903-22), the Belarusian language was 'an inseparable indicator of the Belarusian nationality during its centuries-old history.' [16] Conversely, the use of the Russian or the Polish language among Belarusians generally has been an indicator of cultural and political allegiance to Russia or Poland. The conceptual fusion of language and nationality (citizenship), although challenged by some, is still brimming with political implications. 'If the entire official documentation in our country is conducted exclusively in the language of a neighboring state, i. e., in Russian,' says one critic of the present-day abandonment of Belarusian in official usage, 'then perhaps we the Belarusians are not any more citizens of Belarus, but of boundless Russia?' [17]

During the decade of the 1990s, the status of the Belarusian language went through a series of reversals. In January 1990, the Supreme Council of Belarus, in the wake of prolonged and heated public debates, adopted the 'Law about languages in the Belarusian SSR.' Belarusian was proclaimed to be the sole official language of the country. Minority languages were to be protected, and a period of up to ten years was given to make a transition from Russian to Belarusian. The preamble to the law declared: 'Language is not only a means of communication, but also the soul of a nation, the foundation and the most important part of its culture.' [18]

Implementation of the language law, however, was slow and difficult. Firstly, there was stubborn resistance by the bureaucracy to use Belarusian, even by those who knew it.

Secondly, the language itself, in the mind of the population, was stigmatized as 'peasant' by years of disuse in the higher echelons. According to some polls, less than twenty-five percent of Belarusians knew their native tongue well and less than fifty percent were willing to promote the knowledge of it. [19] Nevertheless, efforts under the Kebich government (1990-94), with Speaker Stanislau Shushkevich using Belarusian in his parliamentary proceedings, led to some increase in the role of the national language in education and the media. It regained its position in the field of publishing, education and public usage reminding one of its status during the 1920s. However, after Alaksandr Lukashenka was elected president in the summer of 1994, a reversal took place, especially after the May 1995 referendum. One of the four questions asked was whether the voters would agree to give the Russian language 'official status equal to Belarusian.' In spite of ardent protests by some legislators and members of the intelligentsia, the answer was a firm 'yes,' explained by the following: a) decades of Russian being used as the official language; b) weak national self-awareness on the part of a majority of Belarusians; and c) intensive government propaganda, including the president himself, on behalf of the Russian language. Soon, further legal steps narrowed the use of Belarusian in public life. In 1998, the 'Law about languages' was amended in a peculiar way: the choice between Belarusian and Russian for official usage was left to individual bureaucrats with freedom to choose either one. Even more: the updated law, in saying that 'In the Republic of Belarus the languages in the sphere of culture are Belarusian and (or) Russian language,' made possible further elimination of Belarusian from public life. [20]

Currently, mass media, including TV and radio (the latter two totally owned and controlled by the state) use Russian overwhelmingly. In the capital of Minsk, there is not a single college or high school where classes are taught in the language of the titular nationality. Only in a few schools are there exclusively Belarusian-language classes. The number of books and periodicals in Belarusian has been diminishing from year to year. For example, in a three-year period of 1995-97 Belarusian-language publications dropped from 12.5 percent of the total to 5.5 percent. [21] Thus, linguistically, Belarus of 2000 has been pushed back almost to the mid-1980s, when the twenty-eight signatories of the petition to Gorbachev entreated him to save their nation from 'spiritual death.'

Opinions differ whether death will ensue. Professor David Marples, for example, having asked in his book on Belarus, 'Is it possible for the development of a national consciousness and culture to occur without the use of the native language?' answers: 'For Belarus, national development without the native language, especially under the shadow of a much larger Slavic neighbor with a lengthy historical tradition as an empire, was virtually impossible." [22]

The Belarusian language indeed has been losing ground in favor of Russian in the years since 1995. If the 1999 census is to be believed, Belarusian now is spoken at home by 36.7 percent of the population and Russian by 62.8 percent. But the question should be asked: Is Russian, spoken by Belarusians, unavoidably a carrier of Russian cultural and political identity? Apparently, not so, if one looks at Belarus's urban centers (where 69 percent of the population lives) and rural areas. For example, the predominantly Russian speaking capital of Minsk (population 1.7 million) has become a hotbed of political activism in defense of Belarus's sovereignty and independence. Meanwhile the Belarusian speaking villages have turned themselves into fortresses of conservatism and nostalgia for Soviet times and reintegration with Russia. There is a growing distinction between linguistic and political Russification. Russian in Belarus in many cases is as much a language of cultural renewal of the country and its independence as Belarusian. There may be, even if the comparison is distant, a similarity to English in Ireland or German in Austria. The Minsk researcher, Oleg Manayev, in his analysis of the republic's electorate provides a 'sociological photo' of a voter who is 'almost undoubtedly an opponent of Lukashenka': 'a young educated Minsker, actively engaged in entrepreneurship, who speaks Russian, supports Belarus's independence and is West-oriented. [23] Other examples of Russian being used to raise national self-awareness are bilingual independent newspapers (*Narodnaya Volya, Nasha Svaboda, Rabochy* and others), where Russian-language commentaries expose the treasonous nature of the Lukashenka regime and advocate preservation of the republic's independence.

It is true that defenders of Belarus's nationhood insist that free development and wide public usage of the native language is a *sine quo non* condition for full-fledged national statehood. They are not only right in their insistence, but also stand on solid constitutional ground. The country's 1994 constitution, even as amended by Lukashenka in 1996, names two 'state languages' – Belarusian and Russian, and in that order. As of now, only Belarusian is used on the republic's money and postage stamps. Also names in foreign passports are inscribed in the Belarusian variant only. On the official level, the ideal of a Belarusian speaking nation has not been abandoned. Alaksandr Sasnouski, minister of culture until November 2000, explaining the policy of his ministry, said: 'The Belarusian people bind up their future with national culture, which serves as a guarantor both of their sovereign existence and integration into a kind of bicultural community and, eventually, into world culture.' According to Sasnouski the desirable 'linguistic person' of tomorrow 'should speak,' among other languages, 'his native, national language; a language of interethnic, international relations (Russian, English) and the languages of Belarus's neighbors.' [24]

Belarus today contains many vestiges of the past Soviet era: the KGB; the statues of Lenin; the official holiday of the October Revolution; a disproportional number of Russian names of streets and collective farms; the (wordless) national anthem, etc. On the other hand, however, there is a slow institutionalization of nationhood. Thus, the former Supreme Council (Soviet) was renamed the National Assembly; the Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Sciences; the Central Historical Archive, the National Historical Archive. Belarus today is a participant in the Olympic Games. The phrase "our country" (*nasha kraina*, in Belarusian; *nasha strana*, in Russian) which used to mean 'Soviet Union' before 1991, now means 'Belarus.' All this is accompanied by ongoing, albeit slow and unspectacular, cultural processes, with scores of small youth groups involved, that are contributing to the sense of national identity and patriotic impulses. The following is one of a number of new occurrences -- an interesting relationship between musical creations by young people and national identity: 'The program "I was born here," writes a musicologist, 'can do what either parliamentary commissions, or ideological organs were incapable of doing... The two dozen songs, many of which have been known for a long while, in their new reading and new context contain not simply a strong artistic potential, but also that idea which is able to become "a unifying and directing" power [a reference to the past leading role of the Communist Party – J.Z.].' [25]

Religious revival in Belarus has also been a factor in the slow rise of national consciousness. A recent study by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences

has shown that forty-seven percent of the population are believers, while twenty percent are non-believers and thirty-three percent could not provide an answer as to their religious conviction. Among the believers, seventy-eight percent are Orthodox Christians, nine percent Catholics and the rest belong to various other denominations.[26]

Orthodox Christian believers are organized in the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC), since 1989 an exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. The BOC is headed by an ethnic Russian, Metropolitan Filaret [Vakhromeyev], and has been a potent factor in the cultivation of the 'Russian spirit' of its flock. Lukashenka, who once called himself an 'Orthodox atheist,' told Patriarch Aleksey II of Moscow on a visit to Minsk that 'We are an Orthodox country... and we will always be devoted to Orthodoxy.' [27]

During the 1989-94 period, in tune with general Belarusianization of cultural life, the Belarusian language and local traditions gained acceptance in some areas of religious activity of the BOC. The Feast of All-Belarusian Saints was established, translation of the Gospel into Belarusian begun, publication of Belarusian-language calendars and a periodical was launched, and Belarusian was allowed in certain religious services. But the idea of the autocephaly of the BOC, recently aired by some clergy and laymen, has a long way to go. As one of its protagonists put it, 'The path toward a Belarusian national [Orthodox Christian – J.Z.] church goes through an INDEPENDENT NATIONAL BELARUSIAN STATE! (emphasis in the original – J.Z.) ... Only then could one could speak also about autocephaly.' [28]

As to the Roman Catholic Church in Belarus, it is characterized, as a result of history, by a close pro-Polish orientation in its linguistic and cultural expression. The equation of Orthodoxy with Russianness and Catholicism with Polishness is still deeply ingrained in the popular mind. Nevertheless, in both of these confessions there are priests and lay people who appreciate the significance of the Belarusian language in religious life. Belarusian-language books and a periodical have been also published for Catholic believers.

Fully devoted to the cause of religious and national rebirth is the small Belarusian Greek-Catholic (Uniate) Church, which uses Belarusian exclusively in its services and publications, but faces serious hurdles from both the leadership of the BOC and lay authorities, subservient to the official pro-Moscow policies.

Historical Scholarship and Education

The end of the Communist Party's control of ideology and the 1990 declaration of sovereignty loosened constraints on historical scholarship and opened new layers of the past and a wider freedom to interpret it. The new coat-of-arms and the national flag, adopted in 1991, harked back to the history of the medieval Duchy of Polatsk and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where Belarusian culture flourished, as well as the 1918 Belarusian National (Narodnaya) Republic that preceded the establishment of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. The past, it seemed, would become prologue for a new future.

At the end of 1992, Prime Minister Vyachaslau Kebich laid out the views of his government on the role of national culture in the reconstruction of the nation's damaged spirit. In a speech that was advertised as a major address to the intelligentsia Kebich said: 'If we are a nation, we should by all means have our own national holy places. It is not easy for us to shape our national self-awareness with the national heritage we have received, not easy to reconvince our contemporaries and successors that we have a history of our statehood, that we are not some rootless Ivans. ... That is why any efforts, state and public initiatives, to revive our national history are so necessary and valuable.' [29]

Vasil Kushner, editor-in-chief of the newly launched quarterly, *Belaruski histarychny chasopis* [Belarusian historical journal], spelled out the approach to be taken: 'We openly and sincerely state that our policy and the main goal of the journal will be to contribute to the process of national rebirth and deepening the national consciousness of the Belarusian people... This is the national policy, enshrined in a series of legislative acts of the Republic of Belarus.' [30]

The journal published an article, 'On the national conception of historical education in the Republic of Belarus,' where a new picture of the past was painted, starting with the ethnogenesis of the Belarusian people. The Belarusians were viewed no more as a branch of 'Old-Rus'ian nationality,' but as a Slavicized mixture of Slavic and Baltic tribes (a thesis forcefully advanced, among others, by the Russian Soviet historian Valentin Sedov). Teachers of history were advised to replace such appellations of pre-1917 Belarus as 'Western Rus',' 'West-Russian lands,' 'West-Russian population,' 'West-Russian culture' by the terms 'Belarus',' 'Belarusian people,' and 'Belarusian culture.' [31]

The 1994 constitution of the republic stated in its preamble (and repeated in the amended version of 1996) that the Belarusian people have a 'centuries-old history of development of Belarusian statehood.' Emotional historiography along these new historiographic lines, represented by such historians and fiction writers as Uladzimir Arlou, Kastus' Tarasau, Volha Ipatava, Leanid Dayneka and others, gained the support of publishers. To substantiate a new view of the past and assist in educational efforts, the publication of major tools was launched: a six-volume encyclopedia of the history of Belarus, an 18-volume universal Belarusian encyclopedia, single-volume encyclopedias of the Belarusian language, Belarusian thinkers, an illustrated chronology of the history of Belarus, and several others.

All these trends have been slowed down somewhat as a result of the 1995 referendum. Conservative historians and government watchdogs raised their voices against an 'extreme nationalistic' interpretation of the past. Soon, an 'adjustment' followed with replacements in institutes, universities, and editorial boards, including the encyclopedia of the history of Belarus and the universal Belarusian encyclopedia. In February 1999, Radio Liberty reported that Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Zamyatalin has ordered that 'seditious material' be eliminated from a textbook on Belarus's history in which the past was depicted from the 'positions of the nationally radical Belarusian opposition.' In particular, Zamyatalin denounced the textbook for mentioning repression of Belarusian national culture by Stalin's totalitarian regime in the 1930s. He labeled the book a 'falsification,' pointing to the 'lack of a single official view of the country's history in line with the demands of the president of the Republic of Belarus.' [32]

Apparently, not everyone fell in line following Zamyatalin's criticism. Here, for example, we have quite a different view on Stalin's repression: the newly published textbook for college students of law and history, approved by the Ministry of Education, speaks, albeit briefly, of 'mass repression,' 'Bolshevik terror' and the 'total Russification' of Belarus under Stalin. [33] It would appear that the confrontation between officialdom and nationally-minded elements of Belarusian society is being played out not only in the streets of Minsk, but also in the ministries and other official places. [34]

Civil Society and Civil Liberties

In Belarus, the Soviet regime left in its wake an atomized society with a low political culture and an abysmal lack of interest in public and national life. Asked recently to pick the country's prime minister out of three names, fifty-eight

percent of respondents said they did not know his name. In the eastern region of Mahilou eighty-one percent could not identify him. [35]

The past decade of independence has seen efforts to raise society's awareness of its power potential. Scores of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are trying to increase citizens' civic assertiveness, political activism and national consciousness. There are good reasons for this. One is that, in innumerable cases, authorities at higher and lower levels are guided in their decisions by secret instructions and sublegal acts often in contravention of constitutional principles. NGOs are counteracting such misuse of power, especially rampant in the field of culture and human and minorities' rights. The mobilization of society is steadily growing.

At the beginning of December 2000, a congress of Belarus's democratic NGOs took place in Minsk. Two hundred eighteen delegates decided to coordinate their activities, which include social, cultural and political goals. The country-wide Assembly of NGOs, aiming at the creation of 'a strong and influential third sector,' numbers 430 members. [36]

Activation of NGOs is hampered by a lack of financial support from the private sector. Upon coming to power with his idea of 'market socialism,' President Lukashenka reversed the process of privatization and imposed stringent regulations on any economic activity. As a result, private capital was drastically reduced and placed under strict state control.

Participation of young people in civil society activities reflects general population attitudes. According to some estimates only about five percent of the young people are engaged in public affairs. But most of those so engaged appreciate the values of democracy and national culture. And the capital of Minsk is not the only place where civil liberties are asserted. There are numerous regional clubs, bulletins, small circulation journals (many of them supported financially from the West) advancing the cause of national identity and the country's political independence. Street demonstrations and arrests that have taken place during the last two to three years show an increasing assertiveness of the young who have grown up under conditions of independence. The latest development in this area is the formation in the fall of 2000 of a new coalition of youth groups under the name 'Changes!'.

To counteract grass-root civic initiatives of young people the government has established a 'patriotic youth' union in 1997 pouring into it lavish state subsidies. This organization, however, is heavily bureaucratized and politically inert.

Civic disobedience in defense of national culture has been stimulated by the voluntary exile from their native country of a number of prominent figures who are now active abroad. They include writers Vasil Bykau, often characterized as 'the conscience of the nation,' Uladzimir Nyaklyayeu, president of Belarus's writers' union, politicians Zianon Pazniak, Syamyon Sharetski and Siarhyey Navumchyk, civic leader Hanna Surmach and others. They all are active abroad, each in his/her own field.

Another considerable influence on civil society activities in Belarus is the general support by Western states of an independent and democratic Belarus. Sharp criticism of Lukashenka's domestic and foreign policies by Western chancelleries, as well as in the Western press, has strong repercussions among the democratic opposition in Belarus.

Statehood as a Source of National Identity

Of all the elements that contribute to the formation of national identity, statehood is gaining predominant significance. 'Historical experience shows,' wrote one scholar in the pre-Lukashenka period, 'that neither union with Poland, nor being a part of Russia and then of the USSR allowed the Belarusian people to fully realize their creative potential. It is obvious that only within the framework of its own statehood will such a possibility will become a reality.' [37] Lukashenka himself vows to preserve his republic's sovereignty in a union with Russia, doubtful as that seems. In these circumstances, for many the search for national identity has become a quest for ways and means to reduce the antinomy between formal national statehood and its heavily Russified content. At a recent Belarusian-Polish round table on the idea of Belarusianness and Polishness, Belarusian discussants defined the essence of their national idea as a 'conception of a distinct national state of the Belarusian people' and stressed that the 'main strategic goal of national identity is the survival of the nation.' [38] There is a view that the government, which has vested interests in independence, has no choice but to resort to the national awareness of the population as a sort of barrier against absorption of the country's sovereignty by Russia where the status and role of Belarusian bureaucrats, including that of Lukashenka, will be unavoidably reduced. 'Gradually,' writes one analyst about recent trends, 'the government's rhetoric began to emphasize the need to maintain Belarusian statehood and sovereignty no matter how advanced the integration process became.' [39] Some outside observers concur, including the editors of the most recent volume dealing with Belarus's foreign policy: 'Each day that passes strengthens the sense of national consciousness among Belarusians – most rapidly among the young, the intellectuals, and those who hold the reins of power and see the advantages that independence has brought.' [40]

Conclusion

If saving the Belarusian nation depends on national self-awareness, as Vasil Bykau has postulated, there are indications that the effort to save it may succeed. The main hope for this to occur lies with the young generation of Belarusians and the preservation of Belarusian political statehood. The maintenance of the latter is not only in the interest of the Belarusians themselves, but also of their immediate neighbors and the democratic West as a whole. The world needs to see democratic states along the western fringes of Russia stabilized and strengthened. This would be the best way to reduce the threat of Russian imperialistic schemes which, as history has proven, never vanish and have the ability to reincarnate themselves. Contemporary Belarus is the best proof of this.

Since national identity has been gaining ground in Belarus, the only way for Russia to maintain its dominion over the 'western-gate' country is through suppression of that identity at the hands of an autocratic regime there. Strongman Alaksandr Lukashenka has been demonstrating this stratagem. Therefore, at this historical juncture, what the cause of democracy in Belarus and international security in Europe need most is continuous moral, political and financial support of the Belarusian democratic opposition and NGOs, which are a sure warrant for a peaceful Eastern Europe.

NOTES:

1. *Znamya Yunosti.* Minsk, 16 December 1992.
2. Sherman W. Garnett and Robert Legvold, eds. *Belarus at the Crossroads* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), pp. 6, 7.
3. Stanislau Suskievic. 'Belarus: Self-identification and Statehood.' *Belarusian Review*, 2 (Summer 2000), p.10.
4. *Letters to Gorbachev. New Documents from Soviet Byelorussia.* 2nd ed. (London: The Association of

Byelorussia. 2nd ed. (London: The Association of Byelorussians in Great Britain, 1987), pp. 20-21.
5. *Press-hrupa 'Navina pavedamlaye'* (Minsk: Samizdat press release, n. d.), p. 2.
6. *Selskaya gazeta*. Minsk, 3 March 1989.
7. *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. Minsk, 20 January 1990. 8. See the result of the deliberations in the 400-page volume *Farmiravannye i razvitstsyo natsyyanalnay samasvyadomastsi belarusau*. Minsk, 1992.
9. Zvyazda.. Minsk, 18 March 1993.
10. Uladzimir Konan, 'Arkhetypy belaruskaha mentalitetu: sproba rekanstruktsyi pavodle natsyyanalnay mifalohii i kazachnaha epasu' in: *Farmiravannye i razvitstsyo natsyyanalnay samasvyadomastsi belarusau*. (Minsk, 1992), p. 21.
11. Olga Gapanovich, 'Nam yavno nye khvatayet svezhego vozdukha kultury.' *Belaruskaya Dumka*. Minsk, 1993, no. 10, p. 13.
12. Andrey Vardamatski. 'Belarus i svyet.' *Belaruskaya perspektyva*. Minsk, October 2000, no.9, p. 7.
13. *Belaruskaya Dumka*.. Minsk, 1996, no. 1, p. 19. 14. *Ibidem*. 1998, no. 10 , p. 7.
15. Vyacheslav Nosevich, 'Belorusy: stanovleniye etnosa i "natsionalnaya ideya"' in: D. Ye. Furman, ed. *Belorussiya i Rossiya: obshchestva i gosudarstva* (Moskva: Izdatelstvo 'Prava cheloveka', 1998), p. 28.
16. Y. F. Karski. *Etnograficheskaya karta belorusskogo plemeni* (Petrograd, 1917), p. 1.
17. Anatol Astapenka. 'Rola i mestsa pravaslaunay tsarkvy u nyezalezhnay Belarusi' in: *Ad 'tuteyshastsi' da natsyyanalnay dzyarzhaunastsi*. ([Warsaw], 1999), p. 67.
18. For details, see Jan Zaprudnik. *Belarus. At a Crossroads in History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 137-141.
19. Olga Gapanovich, 'Nam yavno nye khvatayet svezhego vozdukha kultury.' *Belaruskaya Dumka*.. Minsk, 1993, no. 10, p. 14.
20. Leanid Lych. 'Belaruskaya mova yak ab'yekt dzyarzhaunay dyskryminatsyi' in: *Anyamyennye. Z khroniki znishchennya belaruskay movy* (Vilnya: 'Gaudas,' 2000), p. 26.
21.Valantsin Hrytskevich. 'Linhvatsyd, albo Znishchennye movy' in: *Anyamyennye. Z khroniki znishchennya belaruskay movy* (Vilnya: 'Gaudas,' 2000), p. 91.
22. David R. Marples. *Belarus: a denationalized Nation* (Australia - Canada, et al.: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999), p.52.
23. Oleg Manayev. 'Elektorat Aleksandra Lukashenko' in: D. Ye. Furman. *Belorussiya i Rossiya: obshchestva i gosudarstva* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo 'Prava cheloveka,' 1998), p. 289.
24. Alaksandr Sasnouski. 'Nivelirouka kultur? Nye – ikh samabytnasts'.' *Belaruskaya Dumka*. Minsk, 1997, no. 2, pp. 9 and 10.
25. Dmitri Podberezski. 'Eta pesnya khorosha – nachinay snachala.' *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*, Minsk, 7 December 2000.
26. *Belarustoday Online*. Internet Journal, 13 November 2000.
27. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newsline*, vol. 2, no. 186, part II, 25 September 1998.
28. Anatol Astapenka. 'Rolya i myestsa pravaslaunay tsarkvy u nyezalezhnay Belarusi' in: *Ad 'tuteyshastsi' da natsyyanalnay dzyarzhaunastsi*. ([Warsaw], 1999), p. 67.
29. *Zvyazda*. Minsk, 23 December 1993.
30. *Belaruski histarychny chasopis*. Minsk, 1993, no. 1, p. 5.
31. Mikhas' Bich. 'Ab natsyyanalnay kantseptsyi hitoryi i histarychnay adukatsyi u Respublitsy Belarus.' *Ibidem*. 1993, no.1 p. 19.
32. *RFE/RL Newsline*. Vol. 3, no. 39, part II, 25 February 1999.
33. V. A. Krutalevich, I. A. Yukho. *Historyya dzyarzhavy i prava Belarusi (1917-1945)* (Minsk: 'Belaruskaya navuka,' 2000), pp. 193, 228, 229.
34. A detailed discussion of the role of historical scholarship and its relation to the process of nation building can be found in Rainer Lindner's thoroughly researched book, *Historiker und Herrschaft. Nationsbildung und Geschichtspolitik in Weissrussland in 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Muenchen: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999. 35. Andrey Vardamatski. 'Belarus i svyet.' *Belaruskaya perspektyva*.. Minsk, October 2000, no. 9, p. 7.
36. Belarusian Association of Resources Centers. BARC_List NEWS (barc@user.unibel.by), no.121, 4 December 2000. According to *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta* (no. 883, 7 December 2000) 'about 500' NGOs belong to the assembly.
37. Vladimir Miskevich. 'Chas vybora.' *Belaruskaya Dumka*. Minsk, 1993, no. 8, p. 12.
38. Eduard Dubyanyetski. 'Idei belaruskastsi i polskastsi.' *Kantakty i dyyalohi*. Minsk, 2000, no. 10, p. 62.
39. Anatoly Rozanov. 'Belarus: Foreign Policy Priorities' in: Sherman W. Garnett and Robert Legvold, eds. *Belarus at the Crossroads* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), p. 33.
40. *Ibidem*, pp. 177-178

Dr. Jan Zaprudnik is Vice President of the US-based Belarusian Institute of Arts and Sciences and the author of Belarus: At a Crossroads in History (1993) *and* Historical Dictionary of Belarus (1998). *This article is based on the author's paper presented at the international seminar devoted to Belarus and held at Bath University, UK, in February 2000. The paper, along with other seminar material, will be published in the book entitled* Contemporary Belarus: Between Democracy and Dictatorship, *by Curzon Press, London, in January 2002.*

Lukashenka Positions Himself for Re-election

Speaking before the National Assembly on 10 April, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka admitted that he is not much concerned about when exactly the presidential ballot will take place. "It seems to me that, according to the constitution, it is the right of the Chamber of Representatives to set a presidential election date, is it not? As you decide, so it will be," Lukashenka said, in response to a query from a lawmaker who wanted to know which election day would suit the incumbent president. Lukashenka's words, of course, should not be taken at face value. The Chamber of Representatives -- which was carefully staffed by the executive branch in a phony ballot last October -- will set the date of presidential elections as instructed by the presidential administration. As of now, the only certain fact is that the decision on the election date must be made no later than 27 June, while the presidential ballot should take place no later than 27 September. Lukashenka appears to be testing the nerves of the opposition: he knows the date of the elections, while his opponents do not and are forced to remain in a state of suspension. Thus far, this tactic has proved advantageous to Lukashenka: the democratic opposition has not agreed on a single candidate and has not made any significant steps to advertise potential challengers to the incumbent president. Meanwhile, Lukashenka is being vigorously advertised as a presidential candidate by the state-controlled media.

A recent poll by the Independent Institute of Socioeconomic and Political Studies (NISEPI) graphically reflects the Belarusian situation in which only one politician is presented favorably by the state-mo-

percent of the vote in presidential elections, while his potential challengers have ridiculously low support: former Premier Mikhail Chyhir -- 3.3 percent; Trade Union Federation of Belarus head Uladzimir Hancharyk -- 1.5 percent; and former Hrodna Oblast Governor Syamyon Domash -- 1.2 percent.

However, the poll also found that 32.3 percent of Belarusians do not want Lukashenka to serve a second term, while 26.1 percent are undecided on this issue. NISEPI argues that those who are undecided would also not vote for Lukashenka if he were challenged by an appropriate candidate.

Lukashenka is apparently aware that he has lost his decisive support among the electorate over the past seven years of his rule and that he may lose the ballot under unfavorable circumstances. Therefore, he is taking every measure to avoid any surprises in the election campaign. Last month, Lukashenka issued a decree introducing rigorous state control over foreign free assistance to Belarus. The decree was unanimously perceived abroad as a move oriented primarily to block the training of some 14,000 election observers in Belarus, which is being conducted under the aegis of the OSCE. Lukashenka did not conceal the true intention of the decree in his 10 April address to the National Assembly, when he said that the West wants "to falsify" the Belarusian elections by installing its own election monitoring system in the country. He pledged to prevent such a development. The legislative elections in October 2001 -- in which mass violations of election procedures and falsifications of election results were reported by independent observers -- assured Lukashenka that the executive authorities have a tight grip on electoral commissions and that he may count on a repetition of their performance in the presidential campaign. Lukashenka announced that he is not going to change the election law, which gives clear preferences to the administration in manning the electoral commissions at all levels. Changes in the election law were one of the key demands of the OSCE to democratize the election process in Belarus. It seems that Lukashenka is not concerned about possible nonrecognition of the ballot by the international community and wants to stay in power at the expense of further deepening Belarus's isolation.

What really matters for him is how Russia will react to the election campaign in Belarus. Thus far, the Kremlin has not shown its preference regarding Belarus's next ruler. But there are some trifles that are worrying Lukashenka. Moscow has not apportioned any amount of the $100 million loan promised to help stabilize the Belarusian currency (the decision on the loan was made almost six months ago). And the reception of Lukashenka in the Kremlin by Russian President Vladimir Putin on the 5th anniversary of the Russian-Belarusian Union was rather frigid. "If we lose these elections, Russia's days will be numbered," Lukashenka threatened shortly after his trip to Moscow. This could only mean that the Kremlin has not yet given its go-ahead to Lukashenka. All Belarusian commentators tend to agree that the Kremlin -- with its economic and media leverage in Belarus -- can easily unseat the Belarusian autocratic leader and install a new, more moderate one. But the same commentators add that there actually are no serious reasons for Putin to strike down Lukashenka who -- irrespective of his erratic and autocratic behavior -- remains loyal to Russia and its interests. There is also a possibility that the Kremlin will not make any official or unofficial moves to influence the Belarusian elections. Such a development would signal to Lukashenka that he can put all of his administrative machinery in motion and hold, as he has pledged, "the most democratic and honest elections in the world."

Source: RFE/RL *Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report*, April 17, 2001.

Analysis from Washington: Ineffective Authoritarianism

By Paul Goble

WASHINGTON, June 20 - - Belarusian leader Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime has sought to justify its authoritarian approach by saying that harsh measures are required to combat social ills like crime and the drug trade. But police officials in Minsk have conceded that the state's enormous police apparatus has failed to stop the traffic in illegal drugs both into and through Belarus. Colonel Anatoliy Gury of the Belarusian interior ministry said in an interview with DPA on Tuesday that Belarus has become a major transshipment point between Central Asia and Western Europe despite the efforts of his agency to put a stop to this trade. And he noted that more illegal drugs are coming into Belarus and that more Belarusians are using them. Gury stressed that the police have not been inactive: They confiscated 63 times more drugs and arrested 29 times more pushers and users in 2000 than in 1999.

But despite those actions, the price of drugs on the streets of Belarus has continued to fall, a pattern suggesting that more drugs are now available. In 1996, for example, a gram of heroin sold for 100 dollars but now the price has fallen to only 12 dollars, Gury said. And because of that, Gury suggested, he believes the real number of drug users in Belarus is closer to 40,000 than the government's official estimate of only 8,000. Many governments around the world are fighting what is often a losing battle against illegal drug use. In many cases, these governments have found that putting more police on the drug beat, arresting and jailing more distributors and users, and seeking to change public attitudes have not had the impact their proponents had earlier predicted. Not surprisingly, given the direct and indirect health and social consequences of widespread drug abuse, many people in these countries have been willing to listen to those in the police and security services who argue that only more police power can do the job.

But the situation in Belarus is a clear indication that authoritarianism by itself may not solve the problem. Indeed, such measures may in this case actually make the problem worse. According to many observers, the Belarusian KGB is even more powerful than was its namesake in that republic during Soviet times. And Lukashenka has deployed the police and security forces against his opponents with such vigor that many have seen his regime as a throwback to the worst features of the past or even drawn an analogy between it and authoritarian regimes elsewhere. But this report of growing drug trafficking in Belarus suggests that Lukashenka's authoritarian approach has not been effective against a genuine social ill. Indeed, the police appear to be far less able to fight crime than to harass dissidents and political opponents of Lukashenka.

Many of the post-communist countries suffer from this pattern. Indeed, for many, it is a longstanding one. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire had the reputation of being a repressive police state, and its secret police arm, the Okhrana, in fact was ruthless. But despite that, Russia then was spending less than one-fiftieth per capita on ordinary police than was Italy in the same year. And consequently, the police were largely ineffective in many areas. During Soviet times, the ordinary police were stronger, but they were never given the support that the secret police had and consequently often lost out in the battle with ordinary criminals. In both pre-1917 Russia and the post-1917 Soviet Union, the ordinary police did not have the resources their Western colleagues had for the fight against crime.

In the decade since 1991, as the situation in Belarus shows, that pattern has continued and even gotten worse in some countries. Ordinary police in all too many of these countries remain poorly paid and frequently brutal but ineffective in dealing with their larger tasks. Lukashenka has justified his authoritarian approach by arguing that his government can and will fight organized crime. And he has won some popular support because of these pledges. But the report by Colonel Gury of the Belarusian police shows that his authoritarianism may be harsh but it is not effective. And the very ineffectiveness of the government's efforts against a genuine social evil like the drug trade

may cause at least some Belarusians to question the justifications Lukashenka has offered in defense of his authoritarian approach.

Paul Goble is Director of Communications and Technology, RFE/RL, and Publisher of RFE/RL Newsline.

Cracks in the Ruling Establishment of Belarus

Several of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's sturdiest crewmen seem poised to jump off his leaky ship. One of them, Ivan Pashkevich, held top posts concerned with domestic politics and ideology in the presidential administration from 1995 to 2000. In that capacity he was a notorious scourge of the national-democratic opposition. As a deputy since last year to the presidentially installed parliament, however, Pashkevich has begun taking his distance from Lukashenka.

On April 27, Pashkevich went public to announce that he had voted against a presidential bill which would severely restrict foreign missions' and NGOs' assistance to the opposition. He termed that bill "an attempt by the incumbent power to carry out a political purge in Belarus," and a move by which "the president and government will once again startle the world--or make themselves ridiculous."

In a May 2 press interview, Alyaksandr Shpilevsky, vice chairman of the foreign policy commission of the House of Representatives, distanced himself from Lukashenka's condemnation of the United States' antimissile defense plan. Shpilevsky implied that it would be futile to challenge the position of the "United States as the leading world power." By the same token, Shpilevsky urged Moscow to refrain from any "brusque gestures" which might cause a "renewal of the cold war with the United States. That would damage the position not only of Russia itself, but also the situation of all of her allies, including Belarus."

In the Council of the Republic--the upper house of parliament--the chairman of the regional policy commission and immediate past president of that chamber, Pavel Shipuk, started this round of defections on April 17. In a press interview, he underscored the urgency of a policy shift toward privatization and encouragement of Western investments. Shipuk called attention to "the antiquated condition of fixed assets, the tax pressure blocking any reinvestment, and the primitive method of raising state revenue by fleecing business." Instead of all that, he said, the state must introduce incentives for foreign investors to privatize and modernize Belarusan firms. Shipuk, moreover, challenged another Lukashenka taboo by calling for privatization of agriculture. "No improvement whatsoever is possible in agriculture unless we solve the issue of ownership," he concluded (NTV, April 27; Itar-Tass, April 17, May 2).

Whether these actual or incipient defections will make many proselytes among the ruling authorities seems too early to tell. But the considerations which inspired these defections and may inspire others seem clear enough. These include: economic collapse, slowed down though not halted by Russian indirect subsidies; international isolation of the regime; the unrecognized status of its parliament; and the prospect of an unrecognized presidency if Lukashenka gets reelected through fraud in the upcoming presidential balloting. Perhaps--as Shpilevsky seemed to hint--even the decline of Russia's power relative to that of the United States and NATO may serve to concentrate the minds of some among Lukashenka's loyalists.

The presidential election is tentatively due in October. The opposition plans to field a common candidate, and some official circles in Moscow are not above encouraging rumors that they might look for an alternative to Lukashenka. Against that backdrop, desertions from the presidential camp--be they motivated by a long-suppressed patriotism or, at least as likely, by sheer opportunism--can only increase. The process itself has started, and only its rate remains to be seen. That rate could increase if Western media would start paying attention.

Source: MONITOR, Volume VII, Issue 87, May 4, 2001

Belarusian Investigators Claim Lukashenko Behind Dasappearances

By Alexander Campbell

This week's Bush-Putin summit reveals the long list of issues which have come to trouble East-West relations -- NMD, the Middle East, Chechnya -- even the change in NTV's management. One more topic must be added -- Belarus. The extent to which the West is willing to grapple with this growing political crisis will reveal the limits of their determination to deal with other problems requiring Russia's positive engagement for a solution.

Unlike Russia, where freedom of the press is only just beginning to deteriorate and Russian intellectuals are beginning to sound alarms about the return to KGB methods of suppression, Belarus has already been in a freefall for the last five years. Belarus is now characterized by brutal suppression of political opponents, harassment of the independent media and NGOs, total control of every aspect of life by security forces, and so much government interference in economic activities as to make the notion of reforms irrelevant. Most emblematic of Belarus' crisis is the disappearance -- and presumed death -- of four prominent public figures, including a former Interior minister, a former parliamentarian who headed the Central Election Commission; a businessman, and a television cameraman. Many in this former Soviet republic, sandwiched between Poland and Russia, believe that the mysterious disappearances in the last two years of persons associated with the opposition could not have happened without involvement of Lukashenko's growing security apparatus.

This week's shocking news from Belarus, little noticed by foreign media, indicate that the situation in Belarus may be even more alarming than human rights observers believed. On June 11, two Belarusian prosecutors, who had participated in the investigation of one of cases of the disappeared, sent a sensational e-mail to independent press outlets in Minsk. Dmitry Petrushkevich, a former employee of the Belarusian Prosecutor's office, and his colleague, Oleg Sluchek, announced that their findings as investigators directly implicated Alexander Lukashenko and members of his inner circle in setting up a "death squad" to carry out assassinations of the regime's political opponents. The prosecutors, who have since fled from Belarus, claim to have documents to prove this and have begun releasing them.

Petrushkevich and Sluchek allege that this "death squad" is a criminal gang, headed by a special police officer in active service and composed of 5 to 10 current and former members of an elite anti-terrorist unit. They claim that these killers were acting on direct orders from Viktor Sheiman, one of Lukashenko's closest associates and the former head of the National Security Council. Yuri Sivakov, the current deputy chief of presidential administration and Vladimir Naumov, head of presidential bodyguards, are also named as accomplices.

According to the investigators' claims, the group is responsible for more than 30 assassinations, including the abduction and murder of Major General Yuri Zakharenko, the former Minister of the Interior, who joined the opposition in 1995 and disappeared on May 7, 1997 on his way home -- never to be seen again. There is also reason to believe that on September 16, 1999, this group abducted and murdered Viktor Gonchar, Deputy Chairman of the 13th Supreme Soviet, the legitimate parliament disbanded by Lukashenko, and his associate, Yuri Krasovsky, a businessman. And last summer, so the investigators allege, the group also kidnapped and apparently murdered Yuri Zavadsky, a cameraman for the Russian public television station ORT, and a close associate of influential Belarusian journalist Pavel Sheremet, who now lives in Moscow, having left Belarus following his loss of accreditation and release from political imprisonment some years ago.

Petrushkevich and Sluchek say they decided to go to the press after their initial investigation into these political murders was sabotaged by direct interference from the highest levels of the presidential administration. There is some indirect evidence to lend credence to their claims. Last November, when the first gruesome details were leaked to the press implying the involvement of Lukashenko's special forces, Lukashenko

immediately fired the heads of the KGB, the Prosecutor General's office and the Interior Ministry, replacing them with more loyal men. In a sick twist of the plot, Victor Sheiman was named new Prosecutor-General, and Vladimir Naumov was appointed the new Minister of Interior.

Unlike previous speculation about the involvement of the Belarusian authorities in political assassinations, current media accounts abound with many concrete details, which, if investigated further, could provide the necessary material evidence. A number of reporters are pointing to the cover-up campaign run by Viktor Sheiman and Vladimir Naumov to protect the leader of this assassins' gang, Dmitry Pavlyuchenko, an officer of the Interior Ministry, and Vyacheslav Ignatovich, another gang member who is already in custody. The Northern Cemetery on the outskirts of Minsk is indicated as a possible burial ground for the victims, and the murder weapons are also identified.

An official letter allegedly sent by the dismissed Prosecutor-General to his Russian counterpart, in which he asked for assistance in his search for the bodies, can also be an important clue for getting at the truth. Common decency and compassion for the victims and their relatives call for benefit of doubt. Let us pause here, and pray that all this is just another episode in a dirty political game, and that Zakharenko, Gonchar, Krasovsky and Zavadsky are still alive and being held somewhere.

But if proven, allegations by Petrushkevich and Sluchek will mean much more then just another political scandal. This story may have far-reaching political and legal connotations for the future of Belarusian civil society and for the entire region East of NATO's members, including its newest members. First and foremost, the disclosures from this investigation will have direct consequences for the personal future of Alexander Lukashenko, his closest associates and his security apparatus.

The self-styled dictator of Belarus has already unlawfully extended his term in office, disbanded the democratically-elected parliament and substituted it with his own hand-picked appointees in the National Assembly, not recognized by the West. In the international community, he is already deprived of legitimacy as the head of state. This is not going to change, because he seems to be intent on rigging the forthcoming presidential elections to stay in power for at least 5 more years.

But if these allegations implicating him in the brutal murders of his political opponents are based on facts, he could be held accountable even under the existing laws of Belarus and the criminal code in effect. It is naive, however, to expect a fair investigation or a trial in a country where nearly all the advances in the field of human rights, democratization and separation of powers have been reversed.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which has now been signed by a number of states, including Russia, cites among other crimes against humanity "...enforced disappearance of persons, meaning the arrest, detention or abduction of persons by, or with the authorization, support or acquiescence of, a State or a political organization, followed by a refusal to acknowledge that deprivation of freedom or to give information on the fate or whereabouts of those persons, with the intention of removing them from the protection of the law for a prolonged period of time..."

This Statute equally applies to all persons without any distinction based on official capacity. Indeed, the Statute specifically warns that "...official capacity as a Head of State or Government, a member of a Government or parliament, an elected representative or a government official shall in no case exempt a person from criminal responsibility under this Statute." Alexander Lukashenko, called by many the "last European dictator" since the fall of Milosevic, would be wise to remember this.

Source: *Belarus Update News*
http://www.belarusupdate.org/news/analyses/

BELARUS' FORUM

ZUBR - Belarusian Musketeers

By *Ludmila Gryaznova*

Over a couple of past weeks I tried to think about our democratic candidates - Goncharik, Domash, Kozlovsky and Chigir in musketeers' terms. I longed to support them and add optimism to their supporters. Smart and courageous politicians declared their intentions to participate in the presidential race. This fact alone testifies to their braveness and decisiveness. Running this distance today is extremely unsafe. Their predecessors' experience is rather sad to say the least. Disappearances and mysterious death of one of them is another confirmation of the fact. But musketeers idea didn't fit in the picture. One brave act and readiness to sprint the presidential marathon is hardly enough. I'd love to see their more active interaction and determination. If the four agreed to walk shoulder to shoulder along this thorny road, it is only the qualities of musketeers that can lead them to success and ease our destiny. All of a sudden there appeared real musketeers - ZUBRs.

The Belovezhsky imitators of deeds of d'Artagnan, Atos, Portos and Aramis are also vigorous and romantic. They have no thick wallets and loud political titles. Never engage in intrigues, nor build their careers at royal feasts and pseudo-opposition hang-out parties. One thing that is important to them is action. Just like the valiant Frenchmen they run around the country's towns to protect their homeland.

Doubtless, their present actions aren't all about bringing the queen's message to the chancellor. Their mission is more complex. They got to deliver hundreds maybe thousands of missives - to every house and every citizen. Missives, speaking truth about the lives of impoverished Belarusians, treasons of loyal deputies and cowardice of statesmen, the cobweb of lies, spread by the Cardinal and about how the majority is longing for deliverance - decent wages, normal pensions and stability in the country.

One would wonder whether there's something dangerous about delivering such missives. But the Belovezhsky musketeers are constantly ambushed by the henchmen of the notorious individual. They are commanded from above to arrest distributors of special issues, videos, stickers and badges. They even try to take away their uniforms - T-shirts with battle-calls "Time to choose!" and ZUBR logos.

For every intriguer, both past and present, the truthful information about people's thoughts and longings is almost fatal. Every little cardinal wants to keep the masses in darkness and unawareness, rule over them, silly and scared to death slaves. And then a small team of loyalists-shepherds can drive the flock anywhere: to the edge of the abyss, into a swamp, where they drown, having no clue what's going on with them.

The Belovezhsky musketeers don't want the commons turn into obedient sheep and are seeking to deliver objective data not only in the form of printed materials, pictures or symbols, but with the help of their actors' skills likewise. Just as during the times of queens and cardinals they stage clowns' plays at the towns' streets. The present-day buffoons are a "mosaic psycho" and medics who attend to him. Mental diseases are quite commonplace at these perilous times, so the very presence of orderlies and their professional help is highly desired. The crowd is roaring with laughter at watching such performances. And even the schemer's servants are unable to hide smiles on their faces.

Belarus of today has a lot in common with the France of three centuries ago. Both here and there political opponents are being physically wiped out from the public arena. The only difference is that back in those times they simply slew them with swords. Presently people disappear never to be found again. No people, no problems. And nobody cries out for justice. No witnesses of the crime, no weapon, no perpetrators. But the missing politicians never returned home, never embraced their wives, never kissed their children, never drank a cup of wine. They are no more. And others have to speak out. The Belovezhsky musketeers say it aloud through their spray-paint writings on walls. When

people see the word "Where?" they automatically proceed in mind "Where's Zakharenko?", "Where's Gonchar?", "Why did Gennady Karpenko die?".

Following the inscriptions they, young Belarusians, organized a live chain along the Skarina prospect with portraits of the disappeared politicians and late vice-speaker of the Parliament, whose demise occurred at mysterious circumstances. Minsk residents, who happened to be in the downtown that day, watched the strange movements of the schemer's lackeys. Dressed in sport clothes and footwear, armed with walkie-talkies and cops IDs they moved around the central city, trying to bring an end to the musketeers action. But the former turned out way smarter and better disciplined. Having stood for thirty minutes with the portraits of poor victims, they dispersed, escaping enemy's hands.

The unfortunate Cardinal had bad times recently. The turmoil is growing and more breakdown symptoms emerge. Musketeers became his yet another headache. On one of those Sundays in May, when all servants departed to their countryside dachas to sow potatoes, the musketeers gathered together and strolled around the city in a well-organized, thousand-strong procession. They weren't equipped and didn't ride horses though, simply telling the scattered policemen that they were on their way to a pub. Of course, their demonstration wasn't all about beer, but something more serious. They proved their ability to quickly mobilize.

Fair enough, it's no business of mine to worry about the odious figure. My care is to encourage the musketeers. And what I see from their everyday lives makes me astonish and use terms, coined by the great French writer. Looking at the youth's conduct I will agree with Alexander Duma that politics is influenced not only by strife for power and money, but by love, as well.

Only from love one can dive into freezing cold water and swim across Svisloch river with ski sticks and wearing the mask of the "mosaic psycho". No filmmaker can fancy such an amazing scenario, which produced roars of laughter in both civilian and uniformed onlookers. Such improvisation can only be played by an actor, willing to do the impossible for his sweetheart. Only young beauties can stand from 7:00 p.m. until 4:00 a.m. at the doorsteps to the Partyzansky police station, waiting for their musketeers, captured during the street spectacle. Under the heavy rainfall, driven away from the station's steps, they spent the whole night, dreaming about their Atoses, Portoses, Aramises and d'Artagnans. One local Konstantsia bitterly wept and repeated: "If they take him to Okrestina I'll jump under the car wheels".

The Belovezhsky musketeers and their loved ones didn't write on their banners "All for one and one for all!". But that's the motto they stick to, multiplying their power by dozens of times, attaining their objectives and defeating the adversary not with a sword but with high morals, honor and valor. Decisiveness and wittiness, mutual help and love are the major tools, which enable the musketeers to captivate hearts of their countrymen, serving as perfect example to the more experienced politicians.

Ludmila Gryaznova is a deputy of the 13th Supreme Soviet and member of the Charter '97 organizing committee.

[Editor's note: *Zubr* — the Belarusian name for the European bison roaming the Belavezha Forest.]

Source: *Narodnaya Volya*, June 8, 2001 [Charter '97 Press Center] **http://www.charter97.org**

Lukashenka Holds 'Popular Congress'

Some 2,500 delegates attended the "Second All-Belarusian Popular Congress" in Minsk on 18 May and approved a government-drafted program of Belarus's socioeconomic development for 2001-2005. The Soviet-style gathering of Alyaksandr Lukashenka's supporters adopted a resolution expressing confidence that the program "will ensure further economic growth, the efficient functioning of the economy, a substantial increase in the standard of living of the Belarusian people." The "First All-Belarusian Popular Congress" was held in 1996, before the controversial referendum that helped Lukashenka consolidate his authoritarian power and disband a democratically elected legislature. Belarus's official media reported last week that some 2 million people were involved in electing the 2,500 delegates to the congress.

The opposition, however, saw the event in a completely different light. Former Prime Minister Mikhail Chyhir, who participated in the 1996 congress, told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service last week that such gatherings are orchestrated by the authorities. And Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the opposition United Civic Party, commented on the Minsk gathering: "We have witnessed a tragicomedy staged by one man and involving more than 2,000 extras. Its purpose was to improve Lukashenka's falling rating, promote him as a presidential candidate, and create an illusion of popular support."

Lukashenka, who delivered a speech lasting two and a half hours, said the congress is a "direct consultation with the people, the verification of priorities of the course that Belarus will follow in the new century and the new millennium." He added: "Such an approach of the authorities represents the uttermost manifestation of democracy in our state. In our contemporary political life direct, open, and frank talk with people is the basic principle of the authorities." Lukashenka noted that the proposed five-year program of socioeconomic development provides for a 40 percent increase in the country's GDP in 2005 compared to 2000, and a 25 percent GDP increase compared to 1990. Lukashenka pledged that the average monthly pay in 2005 will amount to $250.

Lukashenka also touched upon the upcoming presidential elections in Belarus.. "[The elections] should be held, my dear ones, in an exceptionally civilized [and] open way, in full accordance with our legislation and international standards," Lukashenka said. "I declare to you -- and I know that almost all of those gathered here are supporters of the current course and my supporters -- that I do not want to cling to power by force and injustice. It is no problem to retain the power today. But it is necessary to think beyond the presidential elections. If we go against our society, if we fail to persuade our people that they should support us at this critical point, if this persuading breaks the people instead of making them vote for us, then we will never keep the power, because everybody is waiting for the presidential elections. The West realizes that they cannot win in our presidential elections. But why are they giving money? In order to consolidate the fifth column [in Belarus] and, following the presidential elections, to send [this column] to undermine the authorities in the country."

Lukashenka also lashed out the West. He said the West owes Belarus and other former Soviet republics for their role in defeating the Nazis in World War II. "We, Soviet people, did everything so that from Poland onward people lived wonderfully," he said. "We saved you, and you should pay us back your whole lives. And if you can't, or more likely, don't want to, please don't tell us what to do, leave us alone," AP quoted him as saying. Touching on Belarus's foreign policies, Lukashenka said the top priority is to build a union with Russia. The Belarusian president said his government has been angrily attacked for its intention to form a union state with Russia by both the opposition and Western politicians, who he said fear the possible emergence of a USSR-like "world power center."

Lukashenka noted that Poland has been used "by some states" as a staging ground for attacks on Belarus. The Belarusian leader said that "ultramodern facilities and stations for surveying the territory of the Republic of Belarus" have been erected in Poland and Lithuania near their Belarusian borders. He said he would like "the Baltic states and Poland to act with regard to Belarus on the basis of the interests of the Polish people and the Baltic nations."

Lukashenka described Belarus's relations with Europe and the United States as complicated. He said Europe is reluctant to improve relations with Belarus prior the presidential elections. He confessed that Belarus is ready to cooperate with the United States and even to make concessions "within reasonable limits."

Source: *RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report, May 22, 2001*

Regions Want Domash to Run against Lukashenka

More than 800 delegates representing dozens of NGOs from the Belarusian regions convened on 26 May in Minsk and adopted a resolution expressing support for Syamyon Domash, former governor of Hrodna Oblast, as a "possible candidate" in this fall's presidential election, Belapan reported. "It is evident now that it is possible to return Belarus to the path of progressive and civilized development only if a democratic professional government headed by a new president comes to power," the delegates said in their resolution. They added: "Realizing that the upcoming presidential elections will be fateful for Belarus, its people and future generations, we, representatives of the public of Belarus's regions, declare our active participation in the upcoming presidential campaign and express our support for possible candidate Syamyon Domash."

The resolution also welcomed the statement by five possible presidential candidates -- Domash, former Prime Minister Mikhail Chyhir, Belarusian Party of Communists leader Syarhey Kalyakin, trade union leader Uladzimir Hancharyk, and former Defense Minister Pavel Kazlouski --that they will coordinate their activities in the campaign, as well as the effort by the Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces to work together and propose a single democratic candidate. Although the four other potential candidates had been invited to the convention, none of them was present. The meeting was attended by the leaders of some opposition political parties, including Vintsuk Vyachorka of the Belarusian Popular Front and Mikalay Statkevich of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party.

In his address to the gathering, Domash outlined his electoral platform. He criticized Alyaksandr Lukashenka's activities in the post of chief of state, which, Domash argued, "blocked the creative and moral potential" of the nation. "State power has gotten into the hands of a small group of persons who have no government experience.... The country should be governed by professionals.... We need a government of popular confidence, which would include representatives of different political forces," Domash noted.

Domash suggested that there should be no economic shock therapy, and that economic reform should be gradual, consistent, and irreversible. According to him, two-thirds of the current taxes should be abolished and the rates of the others should be halved. Domash opted for an open economy and the liberalization of economic relations with foreign partners. He also advocated a favorable environment for investment, simplified regulations in the private business sector, and a free choice of forms of management in the agricultural sector.

Domash suggested the restoration of the system of political "checks and balances" by giving meaningful functions to the parliament and using a mixed system in parliamentary ballots, combining party lists with one-seat constituencies. "To ensure freedom of speech, we should sharply restrict governmental agencies' control over the media. Control over the National Television and Radio Company should be turned over to a public monitoring council formed on a parity basis from representatives of governmental agencies, parties, NGOs, and journalists' associations," Domash noted.

Touching upon relations with foreign countries, Domash said steps should be taken to end the international isolation of Belarus and make the country a "factor in international politics, not the subject of a geopolitical fight." He added: "The main task of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should be to prevent a new Berlin wall from being erected on the western border of Belarus." According to Domash, Belarus should maintain good-neighborly relations with Russia, which should be based on the principles of sovereignty and give priority to economic cooperation. The two should change their current attitude of "Belarus and Russia Against Europe" to one of "Belarus Links Europe and Russia."

Source: *RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report, May 29, 2001*

Village Preserves - a Recipe for Inertia

By Zmicier Macviejcyk

In any election voters are linked by blocs to their core issues and geographic location. An observant politician recognizes these blocs. Many a politician fabricates success by playing, and preying, upon the interests, hopes, illusions, fears, virtues and predilections of the electorate. On the eve of the presidential election, the author offers his perspective on what has been described as Mr. Lukashenka's "Voter's Preserve".

Belarusians as a nation emerged from the villages. Unless having claimed to be nobility, every city inhabitant traces his roots to a *khata* (home) along a dusty path. However, no matter how vivid the memories or persistent the grime and dust in the creases, it is getting more difficult for these folks to identify with the village. Among these people, many rural phenomena and views now evoke amazement instead of acceptance and allegiance.

First of all, it is the frightful recalcitrance of the village. Through many planned efforts and programs, attempts to teach the villagers how to farm the land more efficiently and boost production have simply foundered on the phrase: "We'll keep doing it the way our parents and grandparents did it."

Secondly, interpersonal relations there remain on the primitive level. It is an axiom that women should be subordinated to men, and the young to the old. And it follows that the "seniors" are convinced that they know everything in the world — even when it comes to the latest achievements in the world of biotechnology or genetic engineering. Often can be heard the reply: "Well, I know all of that. I have lived long enough to ..."

Another thing I don't like here is the unwillingness to participate in something or to introduce anything new. Liberally and readily applied cop-outs and dismissals like "My cottage is on the edge (of the village)" or, "At least we are not at war !", help to blunt any overall forward movement. The life of the village inhabitant has not progressed far from the 19th century, especially in their world outlook or material culture. Progress means paved roads (not everywhere), collective farm stores, farm machinery (obsolete) in the fields, electricity (frugally an selectively applied within two hours of sun-up and sun-down), TV and infrequent brick houses.

One of the causes of the villagers' material poverty is their lack of education. Only teachers and collective farm chairmen have been exposed to higher education. A person with somewhat advanced schooling has left for the city where it is simpler to apply his abilities and knowledge in *relatively* gainful employment.

In today's society one's level of thinking and breadth of political and social horizons are directly proportional to the extent of his education. A poorly educated person thinks in a parochial way. His abstract thinking is not developed, thus making it difficult for him to see beyond where he stands. Here is the source of fear of everything new, the fear of doing anything beyond the accepted norms of behavior, the fear of the great abyss beyond home — of falling off the edge of the earth. The only desire becomes the preservation of everything the way it is, no matter how bad. After all, one already possesses highly developed coping and survival strategies for the current reality.

And yet, precisely this conservatism enabled the survival of the Belarusian ethnicity. Neither polonization nor russification managed to break it. Belarusians were referring to themselves as "locals", and remained such. Thanks to intransigence, some positive aspects of our culture managed to be preserved.

As noted, in the rural areas the extent of human relations is primitive; and it is highly localized. ("What should I look for in the neighboring village, when everything there is the same as in ours?"). This insularity impedes the penetration of new ideas and phenomena that only reach the village with a great delay and often lose their initial meaning. The press and other news media came to the village rather late and their influence is not as widespread as in the city. Besides, all significant, and especially electronic, news media accessible in rural areas, express the official view. In a relatively short time, the independent news media

have not managed to have a significant impact on the villagers' ways of thinking.

The collective farm is the villagers' chief misfortune, although they don't realize it. To pick up one's piece of land and leave the collective is not easy. Who will be the first ? Through decades of Soviet rule people have forgotten how to work for themselves. They perform their work with indifference: plowing is done someway , sowing is done somehow. Everyone is stealing from the farm - from the chairman to the last watchman. Pilferage goes on unabated and openly; a mutual cover-up system makes stealth unnecessary.

As a result, the collective farms need and get enormous subsidies and now have little to show for it. As long as the land doesn't have an owner, it is senseless to expect prosperity in the countryside. Everyone understands that the collective farm wages and pensions are miserable, and will remain so until the country undertakes reforms and abolishes the collective farm system. However, when the topic of collective farms is broached in a conversation, all villagers rally in support of it.

The village is boozing regularly. This type of relaxation after the workday is considered normal, if not a revered tradition. The villagers make their own moonshine. What makes them drink ? In my opinion it is the absence of free-time activities that could be beneficial for both body and soul. In this matter, it is already impossible to reeducate the younger villagers: from an early age they have followed in their fathers' footsteps.

Another problem of the Belarusian village is aging. There are many villages where all of the inhabitants are of retirement age. In a decade or so everybody will be gone. Sometimes, even now, when you walk through such a village in late fall or winter, it seems to be dead already.

The young people do not wish to work for the miserable collective farm wages, so they leave for the cities by any and all possible means. However, not all of them completely sever their links with the village. Some come here to rest; and most of them to work in order to secure food for the winter. To the very end these people do not become exclusively city inhabitants, but they are not villagers anymore. They bring the city culture to the village, and the village psychology to the city.

For some young city inhabitants the village is already becoming an exotic phenomenon. One can observe it, but is difficult to perceive the consequences. Overall the city exerts the decisive influence on these people. Who knows, maybe someday we will become a real urbanized nation.

Source: *Nasa Niva*, May 14, 2001
Translated from the Belarusian by George Stankevich; edited by Joe Pecevich.

ECONOMY

Little Progress on Economic Front of Russia-Belarus Union

The CIS Summit closed in Minsk on June 1 without the announcement of any concrete actions that might help buoy the sagging Belarusian economy or, coincidentally, the campaign of Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who faces an election in September. The summit did announce the putative transformation of the existing customs union among Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan into a new "Eurasian Economic Community" (RFE/RL, June 1), but provided no indication of how this new organization might boost economic growth in the member countries. Then, four days later, while addressing the parliamentary assembly of the Russia-Belarus Union, Lukashenka berated Russia for introducing unilateral amendments into the customs regime that damaged Belarusian interests, the latest being reduced Russian import duties on imported televisions (BBC, June 5). Lukashenka also lamented the lack of progress on a number of joint economic programs.

One program that had at least resulted in a concrete agreement was the anticipated Russian-Belarusian currency union. In order to stabilize the exchange rate and lower inflation, Belarusian policymakers in recent months have introduced two important changes in the foreign-exchange regime. First, the multiple exchange rate regime was eliminated in September 2000, when the official rate was allowed to depreciate to the level of the market rate. The official exchange rate is now being set at daily free trading sessions at the currency exchange. Second, the government and central bank announced on December 27, 2000, that the Belarusian ruble would be loosely pegged to the Russian ruble as of January 1, 2001. The national bank promised that the ruble would depreciate by no more than 3 percent per month, as opposed to the 5 percent per month rate of depreciation experienced in 2000. This more "stable" economic environment would pave the way for the introduction of a single currency for the Russian/Belarusian union. The plan for implementing the integration of the Belarusian and Russian economies calls for establishing a monetary union on January 1, 2005. The Russian ruble is to serve as the common currency until 2008, whereupon it is to be replaced by a new "union" currency.

Unlike Russia, which at the moment is swimming in dollars, Belarus needs all the foreign exchange it can get. The National Bank of Belarus (NBB) reported official foreign exchange reserves in February 2001 at only of US $365 million. These were insufficient to finance one month of imports (which averaged nearly US $500 in 2000), whereas three months of import coverage is generally regarded as a bare minimum by international standards. In order to help stabilize the Belarusian ruble and facilitate initial steps toward monetary union, Russia agreed to help boost the reserves of the NBB by extending credits. But at the meeting of the parliamentary group of the union in early June, Lukashenka charged that the promised credit had never arrived from Russia. He said that he would turn instead to Libya for the much-needed loan to improve his country's international liquidity. Lukashenka blamed U.S. influence on Moscow for its lack of follow-through on its economic commitments to Belarus. But Russian Duma Speaker Gennady Seleznev, who chaired the session of the Union parliamentary group, told the press that Belarus-Russia merger plans still faced strong resistance in both countries and should be put to national referenda following the Belarusian presidential election (AP, June 4).
Source: MONITOR, Volume VII, Issue 116, June 15, 2001

LEGACY of CHERNOBYL

Chernobyl and Belarus Fifteen Years On: Politics and Policy

By David R. Marples

Introduction

The closure of the Chernobyl nuclear power station by the Ukrainian government on 15 December 2000 marked the end of an era. The disaster of April 1986 remains the world's worst civilian nuclear disaster and possibly the most acute environmental disaster in history. At the same time, there is no consensus on the impact of Chernobyl on health, and the political ramifications continue. Even fifteen years later, there is no widely accepted study on the health consequences of the accident. There is no agreement on the number of victims. There is not even a general view of the success or failure of the methods used to contain the disaster at the No. 4 reactor. At the site itself there remain several organizations all seeking some jurisdiction over the area, some of which should by now have been discredited and abandoned along with Soviet authority.

The investigations into Chernobyl in both Belarus and Ukraine have been affected by political events and by an alarming decline in health

and disturbing demographic statistics that indicate a sharp drop in the birth rate and increasing mortality rates. Plainly speaking, the populations of both republics have fallen to disquieting levels. In Belarus, with its small population, there has been discussion of the disappearance of the republic altogether by the 22nd century. Thus in the background to the health consequences of Chernobyl is a general rise in morbidity rates that serves to complicate any serious inquiry into the impact of the accident specifically. Had Chernobyl been followed by a period of prosperity and significant investment into the health picture in the republic, then such results would be easy to discern. The Chernobyl-affected population would be clearly demarcated.

Two other problems are worth noting at the outset. The first is the International Atomic Energy Agency, which assumed overall responsibility for the investigation of the accident and follow-up activities. Rarely has an international organization (it is affiliated to the United Nations) responded in such partisan and dogmatic fashion. The IAEA has ignored significant research into the aftermath of the April 1986 events and it has fashioned its own account of the health impact (or lack thereof) in reports of 1991 and 1996 (the fifth and tenth anniversaries of the accident). It also dealt initially with the Soviet authorities exclusively and subsequently the nuclear experts of the Russian Federation. In the period 1986-1991 it allowed Soviet reports far more credibility than they merited. In 1994 it belatedly declared Chernobyl to be a dangerous plant and this statement led to international pressure on Ukraine to expedite its closure. Even today the propagandistic elements of Chernobyl remain and they are unlikely to be eradicated with time.

The second is the hyperbolic accounts that have appeared particularly in the Ukrainian media regarding the health effects and the death toll from Chernobyl. They emanate from a variety of sources, including the Chernobyl Union, and organization of cleanup crews, which already has the death toll in the tens of thousands. No corroborating evidence is provided for such totals. There is no list of names of victims, for example, and the total seems to change randomly each year. They help to perpetuate a view of a continuing cover-up of the disaster and they effectively cover the yawning gap between the Soviet period and the present as one of continual deception and secrecy from above, with the hapless and helpless masses below. Some observers have speculated that for some time it was in Ukraine's interests to exaggerate the effects of the accident in order to solicit foreign aid and foreign funds. This was particularly the case as long as the Chernobyl nuclear station, an object of world concern, remained in operation.

Political Dilemmas

The biggest impediment to independent inquiry, however, has been politics, and here the key area is Belarus, the area most affected by high-level fallout. Let us note initially and by contrast the political impact of Chernobyl in Ukraine. In brief, the disaster sparked an environmental movement that later joined with the Popular Movement for Perestroika, or Rukh. By 1991, the reformed Communists in the Ukrainian parliament had effectively joined forces with Rukh to push through various policies on sovereignty, economic control of the republic over formerly Union resources, and ultimately independence. Those same forces have not secured a place in the ruling hierarchy of Ukraine, but certain elements remain influential. Ukraine also benefitted from the fact that the Chernobyl issue remained a world concern: of the G-7 countries and Russia; of the European Union; and the CIS. This factor ensured that Ukraine had to pay more attention to Chernobyl and its effects than might otherwise have been the case. The logical outcome—the closure of the station—would not have been achieved otherwise.

For Belarus, however, the circumstances were dramatically different. There was no equivalent national movement to the Rukh or to the Popular Fronts that had developed in the Baltic States. The Belarusian Popular Front was formed at this time, but it did not have time to develop a program that was comprehensible or acceptable to the large majority of the population. Moreover, the BPF tried to move too fast in bringing change to Belarus. For the general population, insofar as it was politicized, the issues were bewildering: an end to Soviet rule, which seemed inconceivable to many in the summer of 1991; a new language law (1990) that promoted a language that most of the population did not speak on a regular basis; an inquiry into the crimes of Stalinism that culminated in the Kurapaty revelations and flawed government inquiry; and Chernobyl, information about which reached the general public in such a haphazard fashion that it was three years before the public was aware of the area of radiation fallout and six years before an official map was available. One politician was linked to all three issues: the controversial leader of the BPF, Zyanon Paznyak. Paznyak was successful only to the extent that the policies he espoused had the tacit support of the Kremlin and Mikhail Gorbachev. After independence, his cause was a lost one.

For some time, however, the momentum and the shock engendered by Chernobyl carried events forward. Belarus responded to the collapse of the USSR in the only way that was possible: by the formation of an independent state. However, with the devolution of authority, it soon found itself confronted with a mounting health and evacuation bill, and few resources with which to deal with it. Internationally, it remained little known and thus could not solicit the sort of aid received by its southern neighbor Ukraine. The latter also possessed a large, politicized diaspora, and indeed for some years, the international community regarded Chernobyl as ipso facto a Ukrainian tragedy. This was not a complex act of logic concerning a state that had suffered a wrenching famine in the 1930s, German-Romanian occupation during the war, and which had seen a virtual civil war in the late 1940s. In Belarus, on the other hand, there was lacking the sense of a national history prior to the emergence of an independent state. Moscow-rule had ended, but Communists or proto-Communists dominated the parliament. For such people the priority was to hold on to power, to retain the privileges of office so carefully nurtured over a number of years, and to promote in the general population a feeling of nostalgia for the "good times" of the Communist past.

The critical period both for Belarusian politics and the Chernobyl situation was between early 1992 and the summer of 1994. It was in retrospect the period of opportunity, for general education, for the politicizing of the masses. But it was also a disastrous economic period that saw the contraction of the state economy. The populace was allowed a fleeting glimpse into a market system and found it not only wanting but also even ruthless and, ultimately, corrupt. It appeared to benefit certain elements above others: those who had access to scarce goods through previous connections; and those who had managed to use their position in the hierarchy to retain control over property and resources. The brief experiment with the market thus provided false hopes to the people, particularly in view of the fact that under Soviet rule, Belarusian had fared better than most national republics. In January 1994, Speaker of the parliament Stanislau Shushkevich was dismissed on the grounds of corruption. It was a false charge, but the corruption in society was all too evident. Thus to many, the man who led the republic in this brief period was associated with a general malaise.

In this same key period, two other elements are noteworthy: the attitude of the West and that of the Belarusian Popular Front. The United States played a critical role. Under President George Bush, the United States supported the continuing tenure of Mikhail Gorbachev. After the dissolution of the USSR, that allegiance switched gradually to Boris Yeltsin. It did not devolve to the republics, even after the victory of Bill Clinton, who made a brief appearance in Minsk in 1992. US policy, and US aid, was ultimately Russo-centric. For this same period, the US goal was an impossible one: the emergence of a democratic, capitalist Russia. This policy remained in place even after Yeltsin turned the tanks on his own parliament. For the republics, and particularly for Ukraine and Belarus, the results were disastrous. The world's major capitalist and chief military regime, which had prompted them to join a Partnership for Peace, to relinquish nuclear weapons (seen by some as a potential bargaining plea), had ignored them. They were left to sink or swim in a new world, and in the shadow of a Russian Federation that had never fully accepted their new role as independent states.

The BPF, under these circumstances, was in a critical position. It was the chief advocate of the new road, that of capitalist development

in close contact with the West: the United States and the democratic countries of Western Europe. Already there was the example of Poland, a country that had taken drastic steps and survived. The perception of the BPF, however, was often of a political party on the verge of extremism, Russophobic, and wanting to move Belarus away from its natural ally, Russia. In 1994, it failed to occupy the middle ground, and it failed to forge an alliance with Shushkevich that would have allowed it to pose a real threat to the other two contenders for president: Vyacheslau Kebich and Alyaksander Lukashenka. The electorate evidently did not perceive any real alternative on the political right. The choice was between Kebich, the representative of the old bureaucracy and Lukashenka, a member of the rural elite but without any political baggage and with a reputation for his work on the parliamentary commission to eliminate corruption.

The Chernobyl Question

The victory of Lukashenka brought about a new political situation, namely a closer association with Russia and the past, and an aversion to Western influences. Paradoxically it occurred just as the US policy toward Russia was entering a new phase of distrust and caution. By late 1994, following the Soviet invasion of Chechnya, the United States began to give Ukrainian president Kuchma the most favored treatment. Ukraine was seen as a buffer to Russian expansion and threats. Belarus could have been linked to such a policy. However, by the spring of 1995 with the first government-engineered referendum there were already signs that Belarus was moving in a different direction. The power struggle that developed left little time for economic and social issues. However, what made the situation considerably worse was the equation by the authorities of the Chernobyl question with the opposition. In turn, the latter bolstered this concept by using 26 April as the final day in a series of protest marches in Minsk and other cities against the policies of the government. The Chernobyl March was particularly effective because it was one with which even apolitical citizens could identify.

The politicization of Chernobyl is not unusual. As an environmental event it was a singular example of the destruction of land by carelessly conceived industrial plans. In short, there was a subversive element to Chernobyl from the beginning. The identification of the Lukashenka government with the Soviet regime enhanced this effect. The president exacerbated matter further with his demand that the contaminated zone could be re-cultivated and his instructions to the military to begin this process. The public had long been suspicious of the value of government efforts to deal with the disaster and placed its faith in non-governmental organizations, such as the Belarusian Charitable Fund "For the Children of Chernobyl." The result was that Chernobyl became a dangerous issue for the government. It brought Belarus under international scrutiny; it witnessed the arrival of scores of foreigners into the country, and it saw the removal of Belarusian children in the summertime to travel abroad for periods of recuperation. Smaller-scale programs to send children to Cuba, organized by the government, were highlighted in the media but could not circumvent the main problem, namely that the only significant and reliable aid to Chernobyl victims was provided by non-government sources and led by individuals and groups associated with the opposition.

As the government asserted its control and concomitantly promoted a union with Russia, the position of the opposition and of NGOs became perilous. By 1996, Paznyak had emigrated abroad, initially with refugee status in the United States, but subsequently in Poland where he could remain close to but effectively detached from the Belarusian political scene. The activities of NGOs have been greatly reduced. All have been subject to audits and to re-registration with the authorities. The list of those no longer in existence is a long one. The Soros Foundation left Belarus after the deportation of its leader. The arrival of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group two years ago helped to restore the imbalance between government organizations and NGOs but its existence has been a turbulent one, both with opposition groups and latterly with the government. In any case it has not been concerned with Chernobyl-related issues. Politically Belarus has become somewhat isolated in Europe, shunned by the EU and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, threatened by the expansion of NATO to its eastern border, and plagued by the uncertainty of its link to Russia with the emergence of Putin as the new Russian leader.

Added to this complex situation has been the social impact of the events of the past few years, including Chernobyl: the depopulation of villages in the south-east; a series of evacuations, not all of which have been popular; the economic and social decline of the countryside; and a host of medical and health problems that did not exist fifteen years ago. Observers of Chernobyl are aware of the epidemic of thyroid gland cancers, particularly among children. Yet few of the other medical ailments that persist today can be related definitively to the accident. They can, however, be linked to the general decline in living standards of the population and to the poor health habits of the population (smoking, drinking, poor safety levels on farms, etc). A major conference of doctors in Minsk in 1998 revealed some very specific problems, particularly a rise in the incidence of drug use, socially transmitted diseases (particularly the HIV virus), and the reappearance of illnesses such as tuberculosis, once thought to be obsolete. Belarus is also a venue for transients from the Middle East and South Asia who seek to move eventually through Poland and into central Europe.

Since the mid-1990s, Belarus has suffered a worrying population decline that is not offset by immigration from other parts of the former Soviet Union or other states. Infant mortality remains approximately three times higher than that of Canada. The government, however, alludes rarely to such issues. Its mindset is confined to power politics, to the world stage of NATO or Serbia or Cuba and North Korea. Official statistics in Belarus today are less reliable than in the Soviet era. Chernobyl is seen in the same category as Belarusian language politics: a club used by the opposition to attack the government. Chernobyl is thus left to individual scientists and scholars, with as much connection to the present—indeed sometimes less so—than the events of the Great Patriotic War. Fifteen years is a critical time. It is the period after which one might anticipate a rise in incidence of leukemia. It is close to the peak period predicted for the onset of thyroid gland cancers among children.

Yet there is no national program in place. Investment into health care is a fraction of what it was in 1991. There are no official plans to develop such a new program. Victims of Chernobyl have lost their privileges, villages still grow food on and live off contaminated land. The overriding issue in Belarusian villages of Homel and Mahileu regions is economic survival. Paradoxically perhaps, one reason why the rural elderly have not lost their faith in the government is that it has provided regular, however meager, pensions. Today there is an increasing rift between the government and those agencies that could best assist. Belarusian society at the same time is polarized in the build-up to a new presidential election. The politics of hopelessness prevail over basic domestic needs and will continue to do so.

Conclusion

The post-Chernobyl era has seen complex developments in the political and social development of Belarus. A period of increasing political isolation has occurred at the same time as—and is not unrelated to—a notable decline in the general health of the population, which is partly related to the consequences of the disaster at Chernobyl. Thus a reorientation of priorities is a matter of urgency. This paper has concluded that Belarusian health problems do not currently occupy a place of priority in the Western democracies, which have been concerned primarily with the reduction of political and human rights for most of the population over the past six years. Yet the health problems persist and have been made significantly more complex by two factors: the association of concern for Chernobyl with the political opposition; and the decline in the living standards of the population. This decline occurred particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the severing of economic ties with neighboring republics. It was made worse by the financial collapse that occurred in the Russian Federation in the Fall of 1998.

Unlike Poland or even Ukraine, Belarus has not compensated for this loss either by ties to Central and Eastern Europe, or by the receipt of significant Western aid. It is imperative that this Congress and others disseminate as widely as possible information about the health situation in the republic and the need for international programs. I have argued further that the priority might be medical-education programs in which health care and social work professionals spend extended periods of time in the republic working with Belarusian counterparts. The prognosis of the disappearance of the population of Belarus from the map of Europe in the future is unquestionably gloomy and anticipates a complete failure to address existing social and economic problems. However, the republic requires an extended period of political stability, economic revival, and above all the will to deal with problems that have not been alleviated, and in fact have only worsened with the passage of time.

Dr. David R. Marples is professor of history at the University of Alberta and the author of Belarus: From Soviet Rule to Nuclear Catastrophe (1996) *and* Belarus: A Denationalized Nation 1999). *He delivered the above paper at the V World Congress, "The World After Chernobyl," in Miensk on April 18, 2001.*

BELARUSIANS ABROAD

Freedom Day Observances in the United States

New York City (continued from the Spring issue of the *Belarusian Review*)

The festive gathering (on March 18, 2001) was addressed by:

Ivonka Survilla, President of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic,

John L. Armstrong, Belarus Desk of the US Department of State,

Anton Shukieloyts, National Chairman of the Belarusian American Association

Zianon Pazniak, chairman of the Conservative Christian Party of the Belarusian Popular Front,

Peter Zalamaev of the International League of Human Rights

Dr Vitaut Kipel and Dr. Jan Zaprudnik of the Belarusian Institute of Arts and Sciences.

Mr. Peter Zalamaev remarked that the International League of Human Rights is watching the events in Belarus closely, and is actively helping Belarusian human rights and opposition forces, independent media and defense lawyers. In his opinion, Lukashenka's anti-national policies are beginning to backfire. In a russified Belarus a steadily increasing number of people are returning to their unique native culture, language and their national identity.

Following is the text of the address by Mr. John L. Armstrong:

It is a great honor to be able to represent the-U. S. Government at this commemoration of Belarusian Independence Day. As we all know, March 25 marks the anniversary of the declaration of the Belarusian National Republic in Minsk in 1918. The Belarusian National Republic was the incarnation of the Belarusian people's desire for freedom, democracy and Independence.

On occasions like this, I am reminded of the words of Czech author Milan Kundera, who wrote, "the struggle of Man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."

In such struggles against authoritarian power, a diaspora has a special role to play by freely and openly marking the events that are key to its people's historical memory in the struggle against authoritarian power in Belarus, the Belarusian diaspora has a special rote to play in freely and openly marking the events that are key to the historical memory of the Belarusian people. A good memory, a good knowledge of the past, is also important because it provides one with the firm foundation needed to act effectively in creating the future. A lack of knowledge of the past can lead one into grave error.

For example, some who do not know the history of Belarus draw the mistaken conclusion that citizens of Belarus are incapable of creating a democracy. These people forget that Belarusians stood on the side of freedom at Grunwald and Orsha. These people forget that Belarusians fought *Za vashu i nashu svabodu* (For your freedom and ours) in the 19th century. These people forget that in the fourth issue of *Muzyckaja Prauda* (Peasant's Truth), Kastus Kalinouski expressed a basic principle of democracy when he wrote: *nie narod zrobleny dla uradu, a urad dla narodu* (the people are not created for the government, but the government for the people). The people who say that the Belarusians cannot create democracy forget that the Belarusian people, through their actions in 1990 and 1991, chose democracy and independence.

The U.S. Government has a good memory. The U.S. Government remembers the choice made by the Belarusian people in 1990 and 1991. The U.S. Government remembers the undemocratic and unconstitutional 1996 referendum, which Aleksandr Lukashenko used to enact a new constitution, dismiss the legitimate Belarusian parliament, and to extend his term in office. The U.S. Government remembers that Aleksandr Lukashenko did not step down when his legal term In office ended on July 20, 1999. The U.S. Government remembers that Zianon Pazniak, Parliamentary Chairman Syamyon Sharetski and Tamara Vinnikava were forced to flee their homeland and remain abroad out of fear for their safety. The U.S. Government remembers the empty places at the family table left by the disappearance of Gen. Yuriy Zakharenka, Deputy Supreme Soviet Chairman Viktar Hanchar, Anatoliy Krasovskiy, and Dzmitry Zavadskiy. The U. S. Government remembers that instead of carrying out a serious investigation of the disappearances, the Lukashenko regime has harassed not only the families of the disappeared (forcing Gen. Zakharenko's family to seek asylum in Germany) but also has harassed others who have sought the truth. The U.S. Government remembers that Deputy Andrei Klimau is still in prison as the result of a political show trial. The U.S. Government remembers that the October 2000 parliamentary elections fell far short of international norms for free and fair elections, were not recognized as democratic by the international community, and that the "parliamentary entity" created by these elections has no legitimacy.

With this firm understanding as a basis to look to the future, it should come as no surprise that U.S. policy toward Belarus has not changed with a change of administrations. The aim of U.S. policy remains the restoration of democracy in an independent Belarus. We remain committed to working with all those who share this goal.

The presidential elections planned for Belarus this year present an excellent opportunity to start to restore democracy to Belarus. The Belarusian people want to pick their next president in truly free and fair elections that the international community can recognize as democratic. We have strongly urged the Belarusian authorities to conduct democratic elections and we wilt continue to urge them to do so. Only a return to democracy in Belarus can improve relations with the United States. Only a return to-democracy can truly guarantee Belarus' independence and prosperity.

Today, as we mark Belarusian Independence Day, this is my wish for you, for the Belarusian diaspora throughout the world and for all the citizens of Belarus: that this year's presidential elections be free and fair and that these elections bring democracy back to an independent, prosperous Belarus.

Washington, DC.

On March 25, 2001, in front of the Belarusian embassy in Washington, D.C., representatives of the Belarusian-American community staged a protest demonstration against the policies of Lukashenka's regime, aimed at genocide of the Belarusian people and liquidation of its state sovereignty. They also protested the interference of Russia's leading circles in Belarus' internal affairs.

For about two hours Belarusians of various ages — mostly young people — from New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts and Washington, D.C. were loudly expressing their outrage at the policies of the present Belarusian regime. They shouted slogans in Belarusian and English: "Down with Lukashenka !," "Belarus — Yes, Lukashenka — No !," "Long Live Belarus !" The demostrators displayed tens of Belarusian historical national white-red-white flags as well as Belarusian- and English-language posters demanding true independence and democracy in Belarus. The passersby were handed out leaflets explaining the demonstration's objectives and the significance of the 25th of March.

Mr. Anton Shukieloyts, the chairman of the Belarusan-American Association then addressed the demonstrators. He remarked that the words "Embassy of the Republic of Belarus" do not reflect reality. "The present anti-national regime has deprived Belarus of its own foreign policy. It just executes the directives of its Russian masters. One hardly hears a Belarusian word from Belarus' diplomats. However, Belarusians of America, together with their brothers and sisters in their homeland, keep up the fight for the ideals of the 25th of March, for a free, independent and democratic Belarus. The day will come when Belarusian embassies will represent the true interests of our people, not those of usurpers or neighboring countries."

Mr. Zianon Pazniak, the chairman of the Conservative Christian Party of the Belarusian Popular Front, then addressed both the demonstrators and the embassy employees. He stressed that the 25th of March and the ideals of freedom and independence impose a moral duty on all Belarusians and Belarus' citizens, regardless of of their present political orientation . " Lukashenka's regime is not eternal. Therefore everyone employed by the state should decide which side he's on, and work for the benefit of his homeland, not the present regime."

STATE OF NEW YORK
EXECUTIVE CHAMBER

Whereas, on March 25, 1918, the All-Belarusan Congress proclaimed the independence of the Belarusan National Republic; and

Whereas, a constitution was adopted, providing freedom of speech, press and assembly, and many other protections for the liberty and dignity of the individual; and

Whereas, the pursuit of the Belarusan people of independence and democracy is an inspiration to all and deserves the support of the entire free world; and

Whereas, thousands of American citizens of Belarus descent now residing in New York State join in commemorating the 83rd anniversary of the proclamation of the independence of the Belarusan National Republic;

Now, Therefore, I, George E. Pataki, Governor of the State of New York, do hereby recognize March 25,2001 as

BELARUSAN INDEPENDENCE DAY

in the Empire State.

(Signed)

George E. Pataki, Governor

STATE OF ILLINOIS
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
Proclamation

WHEREAS, on March 25, 1918, the Belarusian Democratic Republic was proclaimed; and

WHEREAS, Belarus has courageously struggled for independence for more than 50 years; and

WHEREAS, Belarusian Americans have played a significant part in the progress of Illinois and have proudly shared in the progress of Illinois and have proudly shared their culture, heritage, and talents with our state; and

WHEREAS, events are being held in the Belarusian community to commemorate the 83rd anniversary of Belarusian independence; **THEREFORE,** I, George H. Ryan, Governor of the State of Illinois, proclaim March 25, 2001, as **BELARUSIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY** in Illinois.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Illinois to be affixed

Done at the Capitol, in the City of Springfield, this thirty-first day of January, in the Year of Our Lord two thousand and one , and of the State of Illinois the one hundred and eighty-third.

(Signed)

Jesse White, Secretary of State

George H. Ryan, Governor

Poland's Belarusian Minority Complains of 'Marginalization' in Public TV

The Belarusian Union (ZB), a minority organization based in Bialystok, feels that public television is infringing laws on radio and television broadcasting and is "marginalizing" Belarusian minority issues, PAP reported on 9 June. To support its claim, the ZB cited plans by the Polish Television's Bialystok station to reduce the number of broadcasts of a program that caters to the minority. In a letter to Polish Television Joint-Stock Company Chairman Robert Kwiatkowski, the ZB said the presence of programs for national minorities is "imperceptible" on the central airwaves of Polish Television. The ZB adds that the regional stations are also withdrawing "from implementing the mission of public television." It cites the example of the Bialystok public television center, where the Sunday minority program "Sami o sobie" [About Themselves] is, according to information the organization possesses, to be broadcast just once every two weeks during the summer holiday season. The ZB stresses that this is a show with high ratings in regional programming, second only to newscasts. The director of the center, Krzysztof Jozwiak, explained that during the summer period the program "Sami o sobie" will continue to appear every week, but that it will have a premiere edition every second week, alternating with repeats from the archives. He stressed that it is economic necessity, not an attempt at discrimination of the minorities, that forced the management to adopt such a decision.

Source: (RFE/RL *Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine* Report, June 12, 2001)

MEDIA WATCH

PRESS REVIEW

Poland Can Help Belarus? (*The Wall Street Journal*, "The Polish Model," June 14. 2001) -- On the eve of President Bush's visit to Poland, the London and Warsaw-based journalist, Anne Applebaum, proposes that the United States use Poland as a model for achieving reforms in Belarus and Ukraine.

In regard to Belarus, she writes: "The notion of Poland as a "bridge between East and West" has, it is true, been around for some time--as a metaphor used by Polish philosophers and poets. But it is now imperative that diplomats and politicians give it more substance. For if the extent of Polish success is sometimes not appreciated in the West, the extent of the economic and political disaster in Ukraine and Belarus is virtually unknown. How many realize that Belarus is now led by a semi-fascist regime--that its president, Alexander Lukashenko, has shut down the free press and the political opposition, cut off ties with the West, and frozen his country's economy in the centrally planned past? .... Yet both Ukraine and Belarus are countries with deep cultural ties to Poland — and anyone desiring to dispense aid and advice to these countries should put those ties to use. ."

Death Squad in Belarus (*Los Angeles Times*, "2 Who Alleged Belarus Death Squad Missing," June 20, 2001) — In a lengthy article, the Times reports that "Two former state prosecutors who investigated the suspected murders of opposition figures in the former Soviet republic of Belarus went missing last week after accusing authoritarian President Alexander G. Lukashenko of sponsoring a death squad to 'disappear' his enemies. The prosecutors — Dmitry Petrushkevich and Oleg Sluchek — are believed to have fled the country after sending information on the alleged death squad to journalists."

A Belarusian human rights group said that the pair had been granted refugee status in the United States. "Without commenting on individuals, we're quite aware of the situation," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said in Washington. "We think these revelations are important. They give an urgency to clearing up this entire matter."

According to the article, the two men also alleged that the death squad was involved in the disappearance of Lukashenko political rivals in 1999 and last year. Some observers said the accusations about the alleged death squad and the Zavadsky case could serve as a catalyst for the opposition in Belarus.

Pope to Visit Belarus? (*The New York Times*, "Pope, Ending Visit to Ukraine," Jun 28, 2001) — The article is about Pope John Paul II trying to heal the rift between the Greek Catholics and the Orthodox during his 5-day visit to Ukraine and pave the way for a visit to Moscow. But the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Aleksy II does not want him to come.

"Whether this trip will bring the pope any closer to visiting Moscow is far from clear," notes the article. "But he already has plans to visit two other former Soviet republics with Orthodox and Catholic communities, Kazakhstan and Armenia, in September. The pope is also said to be considering a trip to Belarus, where Patriarch Aleksy was throughout the pope's visit, warning Orthodox believers that the Vatican was seeking to 'divide us.' "

[**Editor:** *A photograph from the Associated Press (as it appeared in the June 2 Boston Herald) shows the pope surrounded by pilgrims in Lviv, Ukraine, and the presence of Belarusians is evidenced by the prominent display of the Belarusian white-red-white flag and at least two banners in Belarusian, including one reading: "HOLY FATHER, PRAY FOR BELARUS"*]

Return from the Communist Antiquity

(*Czech weekly REFLEX*, May 10, 2001) — *Following are excerpts from an article by* **Michal Plavec**

It took me a while to realize that they finally came. The tension of the last several months disappeared. I didn't know what would follow, but their coming was one of my few certainties. Excuse me for not introducing them; "they" were the agents of Belarusian State Security Committee — the KGB.

They were accompanied by employees of the OVIR — the visa and registration section of Belarus' interior ministry. They immediately — (while still in my apartment) — insisted that I sign two documents. I did not. They said I was living in a different apartment than I was registered in, thus violating the residence regime and other laws. I asked to see a lawyer and a representative of the Czech embassy. They did not permit it. After I refused to sign, they gave me five minutes to pack my belongings and took me to the central KGB in Miensk. They locked me in a detention room and again insisted on my signing the documents. Finally I was allowed to call the embassy; the Czech charge d'affaires in Miensk, Mr. Ales Fojtik, came quickly. He advised me to write in Czech that I do not wish to sign anything since I was not allowed to consult with a lawyer, and that I don't agree with the formulation of charges. An hour and a half later I found myself at Warsaw airport, passing through passport and custom control. Only then, I regained my perception of time.

I first visited Belarus as a journalist in 1999. I remained there with brief interruptions from March 2000 until my deportation in April of this year. In addition to writing, I coordinated the work of the Belarus Center of the foundation "People in Need." We helped the opposition organizations, arranging trips by Belarusians to the Czech Republic and by Czechs to Belarus, as well as hands-on-training for Belarusian newspapermen, economists, lawyers, judges. In December, we arranged a meeting between representatives of the Belarusian opposition and Czech president Vaclav Havel. We produced documentary films for Czech TV.

Today, the regime of Alaksandr Lukashenka is the last dictatorship in Europe. When in 1994 he was elected the first president of Belarus, most people believed him. They saw in him a man who will fight corruption and install order in the country.

After his election, Lukashenka prescribed return of the Soviet-style socialist economic system. Since 1996, after the second regime-staged referendum, he has been enjoying unlimited power. One of his first steps was the dissolution of Belarus' legitimate parliament. Regularly elected lawmakers were replaced by Lukashenka's stooges. Latest elections to this new "National Assembly", held in October 2000, were not considered democratic by the European parliament. As a result, Belarus now has no representative in this institution. People have been protesting against this new style of autocracy

I will probably always remember the Day of Freedom — the 25th of March 2000. From the early morning hours, thousands of special emergency workers were stationed along the main Miensk streets. Reinforcements were waiting on the side streets — in buses and army trucks, fire engines and armored troop carriers. The rallying point on Jakub Kolas square was off-limits to the public. People assembled on sidewalks and on the square, only to be dispersed. Up to 600 people were detained, including 40 journalists. The crew of the Russian ORT television had its equip-

ment smashed. The Polish Sejm deputy Mariusz Kaminski was arrested; as was the OSCE representative Christopher Pannikov. Both had diplomatic passports.

A Country of Disappearing People

It is beyond dispute that human rights in Belarus are being violated. The fact that many politicians are jailed, is not surprising. Officially they were convicted of embezzlement, bribery or abuse of power. Of course the international community considers them political prisoners or prisoners of conscience. Those who became a real thorn in the dictator's side, simply disappeared. According to authorities, about 3000 people disappear in Belarus annually. "So why worry about a few politicians ?" is the cynical retort of those in power.

The media and the opposition political parties are permitted to operate, just like non-governmental organizations. However, they experience enormous pressure and legal harassment by authorities. It's a wonder that they still exist and perform any activity. Until recently the opposition was able to receive material and financial support from the West . This is not possible anymore. According to Lukashenka's decree # 8 receiving this kind of support will be punishable by fines and confiscation of property. Any assistance from abroad must be approved by state authorities.

The Fear before Presidential Elections

You might be asking: why was I deported ? The next presidential elections in Belarus are scheduled for the end of September at the latest. Actually, they were supposed to take place two years ago. Of course Lukashenka declared that the referendum of 1996 automatically extended his term of office for an additional two years. The regime is using all means possible to limit or completely stop the activities of opposition organizations. This includes not only the above mentioned decree # 8, but also mysterious burglaries of offices of the non-governmental and human rights defense organizations.

Oddly enough, the burglars are interested only in one thing: computer hard disks. Activists are being arrested, students are prevented from participating in demonstrations by threats of expulsion from schools, workers are kept quiet by threats of being fired. Opposition presidential candidates are being shadowed and prosecuted. Lately their children are becoming a target of the secret services' attention. They are usually accused of illegal possession of arms or drugs, sometimes of stealing automobiles for spare parts. The latest hit of the pre-election games is the introduction of spy-mania. Most recently the vigilant secret services detected a foreign agent on April 19. He's expecting a jail sentence of seven to twelve years. Police arrested him while he was receiving secret materials. I wouldn't be surprised if it was someone who did the same work I did.

The KGB observes the activities of foreigners very closely. It attempts to shadow people openly or secretly to intimidate them or make them nervous. The phones are bugged, electronic mail is read. The opposition is crawling with dozens of agents; people live in an atmosphere of fear. They lie to each other, and then observe where the false information surfaces. Some are so entangled in lies that they can no longer distinguish between truth and lies.

I was most likely supposed to become an exemplary case. Perhaps I was getting on their nerves: helping the opposition, writing articles and producing films about a country where tomorrow is still in the communist antiquity.

BOOK REVIEW

By Zina Gimpelevich

Beryl Young, *Wishing Star Summer*, Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2001, 136 pp. ($9.95 CDN;$6.95 US)

What kind of life-altering turmoil could a healthy, well cared-for, eleven year old Canadian girl experience? Can she learn that her actions have consequences? Can a sixth grader experience and understand alienation, regret, remorse, jealousy and fulfillment? Is it possible for an outside observer to empathize with such a person or are we talking about a self-absorbed "poor little rich" Canadian girl? What audience is this book intended for?

Well, all of these questions and many more are carefully pondered in this delightful, family-oriented story -- which can be read as a group project. To a grown-up the story will remind how cruel and unaccepting, otherwise 'sweet,' children can be towards a newcomer or 'stranger' from near or faraway. To a child this story shows how sharing, tolerance and good conquer fear, insecurity, self pity and selfishness. Consequently, this story suggests ways for an audience of pre-teens to choose the goodness and joys of real friendship over ignorance and superficial negative feelings.

The plot is built around the recent history of the Chernobyl disaster and its impact on Belarus. Jillian Nelson, the main protagonist of *Wishing Star Summer*, has manipulated her family, which recently moved to Vancouver from Ottawa, into hosting a Belarusan girl for the summer. However, there is an ulterior motive at work: Jillian's desire has very little to do with compassion and a lot to do with finding a mechanism to deal with the issue of confronting a new set of peers and gaining popularity in her new home town. Through the Canadian Relief Fund for Chernobyl Victims In Belarus, Tanya arrives and in short order becomes a disappointment for Jillian. The summer visitor doesn't fit the mold and the ill conceived plans of the little hostess --triggering the changes and learning processes in the characters. These events, like the not unexpected happy ending, are thoroughly and carefully crafted by the writer. Sentimentality runs strong in the story but does not leave an over-sweet after-taste.

I agreed to review Beryl Young's *Wishing Star Summer*, but did so with a critical eye and a sense of apprehension. Because, as one of the three founding members (the other two are Joanna Survilla am Pauline Smith), of Canadian Relief Fund for Chernobyl Victims in Belarus [**Editor:** for more information, log onto **http://www.crfcvb.ca**], I was afraid that my bias would reflect in my opinion. The author, on the other hand, made it easy for this reviewer to be as impartial as it gets. Communications with the Belarusan girl are transliterated from Russian and a glossary is included in the book albeit with some typos. I was disappointed with the use and transliteration of the Russian language to tell the story of a younger sister of Belarus — Belarus is my country of origin — but that goes to the larger issue of the ruthless Russification of Belarusans. Overall, Beryl Young wrote a fine and sensitive, psychologically sophisticated and humorous story with a highly moral touch in it.

Beryl Young is well acquainted with the world of the child psychology: she is a mother of three, grandmother to three, and a foster mother to a child from India. In addition, every winter the writer does volunteer work in Central America. The author is a renowned Canadian journalist and writer, as well as an experienced producer of children's records, one of which went "gold." In short, Beryl Young produced, once again, an excellent piece of children's literature and her *Wishing Star Summer* is highly recommended for ages eight and up.

Zina Gimpelevich is an Associate Professor, Dept. of Germanic & Slavic Studies, University of Waterloo.

[**Editor:** *The book can be ordered through any bookstore in the U.S. through the U.S. distributor at AGD, tel. 1-800-284-3580*]

CHRONICLE of EVENTS

April 12, 2001

BELARUSIAN LEGISLATURE RATIFIES SINGLE CURRENCY ACCORD WITH RUSSIA

The 110-seat Chamber of Representative on 12 April voted by a count of 95 to three to ratify an agreement to introduce a single Russia-Belarus Union currency and on the creation of a new mint for its production, Belarusian Television reported. The agreement provides for the Russian ruble to be introduced as the sole currency on 1 January 2005, and for the introduction of the new currency on 1 January 2008 upon the establishment of the mint. Belarus's Justice Ministry noted earlier that the accord contradicts the Belarusian Constitution, but National Bank Chairman Pyotr Prakapovich urged the legislature to ratify the accord, arguing that it does not include any constitutional contradictions. The ratification of the accord was Russia's condition for disbursing a $100 million credit to Belarus.(RFE/RL Newsline, April 13, 2001)

April 16, 2001

LUKASHENKA'S DECREE RESTRICTING FOREIGN AID GOES INTO EFFECT

Belarusian President Lukashenka's decree banning foreign financial assistance for election-related activities or even seminars in Belarus went into effect on 16 April, Belapan reported. The decree, which was issued on 12 March, bans foreign funds for "changing the constitutional system; seizing power or overthrowing the government; stirring up social, ethnic, or racial enmity; preparing and holding elections; recalling members of parliament; and organizing strikes, street demonstrations, seminars, and other forms of mass propaganda work among the population " (RFE/RL Newsline, April 17, 2001)

April 13, 2001

BELARUS EXPELS CZECH JOURNALIST

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry said on 13 April that it detained and expelled Czech journalist Michal Plavec for "improper conduct," CTK reported. It said Plavec, who is also an official in the Czech-based People in Need foundation, had "coordinated the work of a foreign organization in Belarus and has time and again been involved in unsanctioned mass actions accompanied by arrests." The Czech Foreign Ministry said this reasoning is "fabricated and unfounded." Plavec was working for the Czech weekly newspaper "Respekt."(RFE/RL Newsline, April 17, 2001)

April 26, 2001

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION HOLDS CHORNOBYL MARCH IN MINSK

An estimated 5,000 to 7,000 people participated in an opposition-organized march and rally in Minsk on 26 April held in commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the explosion at the Chornobyl nuclear power plant, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Belarusian academic Ivan Nikitchanka told the rally that 1.84 million people are currently living in areas of Belarus that were hit by the radioactive downfall caused by the disaster. Nikitchanka said the authorities "rob" people affected by the Chornobyl disaster, noting that budgetary spending on Chornobyl-related programs in 2000 was lower by 13 percent than the "Chornobyl tax" collected in Belarus to deal with the aftermath of the disaster. Demonstrators demanded democratic changes in Belarus and pledged to defend the country's independence. The demonstration, though unauthorized, was not attended by police forces and took place without incident. (RFE/RL Newsline, April 27, 2001)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT SAYS HE WANTED TO LEAD THE MARCH IN RADIATION-HIT ZONE

Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who visited Chornobyl-affected districts in Homel Oblast the same day, said he had proposed to the opposition the staging of a Chornobyl commemoration rally in radiation-hit areas. "I would go first, you [journalists] would follow me as usual, and they [the opposition] would follow us in a solemn march," Lukashenka said on Belarusian Television, adding that he even ordered local authorities to clear a 30-kilometer road for this purpose. But then he noted: "[The opposition] will not go here, they do not need that, they need a picture [on television newscasts]. For such a picture, [the West] is ready to pay $500 million. But this picture needs to be accompanied by a new president in elections." (RFE/RL Newsline, April 27, 2001)

May 3, 2001

LUKASHENKA'S FIVE CHALLENGERS PLEDGE COOPERATION

Five potential candidates in Belarus's presidential elections this fall -- Mikhail Chyhir, Uladzimir Hancharyk, Syamyon Domash, Syarhey Kalyakin, and Pavel Kazlouski -- announced on 3 May that they are going to help each another in the election campaign, Belapan reported. They also pledge to decide on a single candidate from among them to challenge incumbent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka after their registration as presidential candidates. "We will have enough common sense after the registration to sit at a round table and agree on a single candidate," Hancharyk told journalists. The five do not rule out that Lukashenka's other challengers may join their group. (RFE/RL Newsline, May 4, 2001)

May 7, 2001

YOUTH FRONT CRITICAL OF THE APPEAL

The alliance of Lukashenka's five challengers and their joint appeal have so far failed to excite the opposition Youth Front. In a statement published on 7 May, that group criticized the five for failing to appoint a single candidate for whom democratic forces in Belarus could launch a promotion campaign without waiting for an official announcement of the presidential elections. But more notably, the Youth Front said it does not agree with the five's declared intention to build a union with Russia: "Belarusian young people do not want to live in either the Russian empire or the USSR. They see their country as free, democratic, and European," (RFE/RL Newsline, May 4, 2001, Belapan)

May 9, 2001

FOUR PROMINENT OPPOSITION POLITICIANS VISIT MOSCOW

On May 9-11, four out of five prominent Belarusian politicians who announced their intention to challenge Alexander Lukashenka in the presidential election later this year and to unite behind the candidate with the best chances for victory visited Moscow at the invitation of Russian human rights activists. A formal purpose of the visit was to take part in the celebrations dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Moscow Helsinki Group, a human rights monitoring organization established by 11 dissidents and chaired by Professor Yuri Orlov, and to discuss the political and human rights situation in both countries. Mikhail Chigir, ex-Prime Minister and former political prisoner; Semyon Domash, a deputy of the 13th Supreme Soviet [the disbanded parliament], chair of the Grodno Initiative and the Coordination Council of Belarusian Regions; Sergey Kalyakin, leader of the Party of Communists of Belarus (PCB) in opposition to the government; and Pavel Kozlovsky, former Defense Minister; came to the Russian capital to meet with the State Duma deputies, officials of the Presidential administration, important Russian politicians, human rights activists, and representatives of the independent and state media.

"The Lukashenka regime created a few myths about itself. The first one is that Alexander Lukashenko enjoys the support of the majority of



Siarhiej Kalakin *Uladzimir Hančaryk* *Pavel Kazloŭski* *Michail Čyhir* *Siamion Domaš*

LUKASHENKA'S FIVE CHALLENGERS

the Belarusian population. The second myth is that the country prospers under his ruling, and the third one is that the current Belarusian leader is the only politician able to ensure the integration between the two Slavic states," Semyon Domash told a press conference in Moscow. "We hope that our visit helped to dispel them," he said. Sergey Kalyakin said that the coverage by the Russian media of their visit helped to break an information vacuum created by the regime and makes him believe that their trip was productive.

Visibly irritated, Lukashenko commented on the opposition politicians' trip to Moscow: "You know, they should not go to Moscow, because Yuri Luzhkov [Moscow Mayor] won't support them anyway. If Luzhkov decides to side with someone in Belarus, he will choose Lukashenko." Making one of his typical preposterous claims, Lukashenko remarked, "Instead, they better give $5-10M out of $800 - 900 million promised to them by the West to cancer clinics to help sick kids." On May 8, at a meeting dedicated to the 56th Anniversary of the Victory over the Nazis, Lukashenko told his compatriots that attempts are being made today to carry out a Yugoslavia-like scenario in Belarus and that five traitors [i.e. Domash, Kalyakin, Kozlovsky, Chigir, and Goncharik - **Ed.**] have been selected to implement this plan.

Once again the International League of Human Rights notes that in citing a figure of "$800-900 million," Lukashenko is actually citing a number greater than the figure for the annual budget of the State Department's democracy programs for the entire post-Soviet region, which was less than $800 million in Fiscal year 2001. He has also incorrectly characterized the U.S. as funding opposition parties. Under U.S. tax law, the American government as well as U.S. private foundations are prohibited from funding candidates or foreign political parties; if they did so, they would lose their tax-exempt status and their programs would be closed. In fact, both government and private donors provide assistance only to non-profit, non-governmental organizations, and they also provide significant sums to charitable activities like hospitals and medical care in Belarus. The budgets for Belarus are publicly available documents which can easily confirm these statements.(Charter 97; ILHR May 14)

May 26, 2001

BELARUSIAN REGIONS WANT DOMASH TO RUN AGAINST LUKASHENKA

More that 800 delegates representing dozens of NGOs from Belarusian regions convened in Minsk on 26 May to express support for Syamyon Domash as a possible candidate in this year's presidential elections, Belapan reported. "It is evident now that it is possible to return Belarus to the path of progressive and civilized development only if a democratic professional government headed by a new president comes to power," the delegates said in a resolution backing Domash as a challenger to incumbent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The resolution also welcomed the statement by five presidential hopefuls -- Domash, Mikhail Chyhir, Syarhey Kalyakin, Uladzimir Hancharyk, and Pavel Kazlouski -- to coordinate their activities in the upcoming election campaign (RFE/RL Newsline, May 29, 2001)

May 31, 2001

GRENADE BLASTS AT RUSSIAN EMBASSY IN MINSK

Police are searching for two unknown assailants who threw a hand grenade over the fence of the Russian Embassy in Minsk in the early hours of 31 May, Belapan reported. The Interior Ministry told the agency that the explosion caused only minor damage to the embassy's fence. The attack came only hours before the arrival in Belarus of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, and other top Russian officials for a two-day CIS summit. Meanwhile, quoting the Belarusian KGB, ITAR-TASS reported that two explosions took place at the embassy last night. President Lukashenka's spokesman, Mikalay Barysevich, told the agency that the blasts are viewed by the presidential administration as a "provocation." (RFE/RL Newsline, May 31, 2001)

June 7, 2001

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS TO TAKE PLACE ON 9 SEPTEMBER.

The Chamber of Representatives on 7 June voted 74 to 12 to set the date for presidential elections for 9 September, Belapan reported. A run-off is to be held two weeks later if no candidate obtains more than 50 percent of the vote. Belapan reported that legislator Viktar Ananyeu told the legislature before the voting that holding presidential elections in Belarus means "wasting money and time." Ananyeu suggested to hold a referendum in order to prolong President Lukashenka's term for another seven years at a minimum. (RFE/RL Newsline, June 7, 2001)

June 8, 2001

BELARUS' PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN KICKS OFF

After the Chamber of Representatives scheduled presidential elections for 9 September (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 7 June 2001), Central Election Commission Chairwoman Lidziya Yarmoshyna on 7 June briefed journalists on subsequent developments in the presidential campaign. Yarmoshyna said those seeking to run in the elections should apply to the commission no later than 15 June for the registration of their "initiative groups" for collecting signatures. An initiative group in support of a presidential candidate should consist of no less than 100 people. The commission is to register initiative groups by 20 June, and they will subsequently be able to collect signatures until 20 July. The registration of presidential candidates -- each of them needs to collect no less than 100,000 signature in his/her support -- should be concluded by 9 August. After that date, registered candidates will be allowed to launch their election campaigns. (RFE/RL Newsline, June 8, 2001)

June 11, 2001

BPF "ADRADZHENNE" SUPPORTS DOMASH

The BPF Adradzhenne called on the united democratic opposition to hold the Congress of Democratic Forces before August 5, when the Central Commission for Elections will start registration of potential candidates, in order to nominate a single candidate from the opposition for the presidency. The opposition's chances to win the elections are very high, said Vintsuk Vyachorka, chair of the BPF Adradzhenne, adding that at the Congress his party will vote for Semyon Domash. (Belapan, June 11)

June 12, 2001

BELARUSIAN INVESTIGATORS ACCUSE TOP OFFICIALS OF POLITICAL MURDERS...

Two former prosecutors, Dzmitry Petrushkevich and Aleh Sluchak, have sent a letter via E-mail to a number of Belarusian media outlets in which they accuse top officials of organizing a death squad and killing opposition politicians Yury Zakharanka and Viktar Hanchar as well as ORT cameraman Dzmitry Zavadski, the Charter-97 website and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 11 June. Petrushkevich and Sluchak claimed that the death squad was organized by former Interior Minister Yury Sivakou following an order from Security Council Secretary Viktar Sheyman. According to the two investigators, after the KGB and the Prosecutor-General's Office had traced the death squad and tried to find the body of Zavadski, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka fired KGB chief Uladzimir Matskevich and Prosecutor-General Aleh Bazhelka. Petrushkevich and Sluchak added that Sheyman then ordered the release of the arrested commander of the death squad from jail (see also "RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report," 12 June 2001). (RFE/RL Newsline, June 12, 2001)

INTERIOR MINISTER CONSPIRING WITH SUSPECTS

Petrushkevich and Sluchak also wrote that Valery Ihnatovich and Maksim Malik, who were arrested on charges of killing Zavadski, threatened during interrogations to take revenge on investigators and their families. Petrushkevich and Sluchak claimed that Interior Minister Uladzimir Navumau, who oversees the investigation of the Zavadski case, made several unrecorded visits to Ihnatovich and Malik in jail. Petrushkevich and Sluchak suggested that Navumau supplied the suspects with personal information about investigators and their families in order to make the suspects' threats more plausible. Quoting Interior Ministry spokesman Dzmitry Parton, Belapan reported on 11 June that Navumau denied the allegations.(RFE/RL Newsline, June 12)

June 13, 2001

OPPOSITION PARTIES DEMAND SEATS IN ELECTION COMMISSIONS

On June 13, the Consultative Council of Opposition Political Parties (the Rada) issued a statement protesting against flagrant violations of the electoral law at early stages of the presidential campaign. The Rada accused local authorities of interfering in the formation of the election commissions and urged the Central Commission for Elections and National Referenda to influence the situation and include representatives of different political parties in the election commissions at all levels to ensure a free and democratic vote. The Council expressed its concern over the fact that although formation of the election commissions officially started on June 8, the application forms for membership in the commissions were not available until June 13. The League notes that Section 1, art. 5 of the Belarusian Constitution states that "political parties and republic associations acting within the framework of the constitution and laws of the Republic of Belarus shall contribute toward ascertaining and expressing the political will of the citizens and participate in elections." Historically, the Belarusian parties were never permitted to observe the elections officially by participating in the electoral commissions a right which has been wrested from other despotic governments in the region by OSCE and which awaits implementation in Belarus. Now, with presidential elections looming on the horizon, the opposition insists on the fulfillment of their legal rights. (Belapan/ILHR, June 13)

June 13, 2001

BELARUSIAN NGOS VOW TO FIELD 14,000 ELECTION OBSERVERS

Some 200 Belarusian NGOs have set up an Independent Monitoring civic group in order to coordinate their efforts to prepare no less than 14,000 observers for the 9 September presidential elections, Belapan reported on 12 June. "For the first time we have created a single, nonparty and independent monitoring network that will cover electoral commissions of all levels on the entire territory of Belarus," human rights activist Ales Byalatski commented. (RFE/RL Newsline, June 13)

June 14, 2001

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER APPLIES TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT FROM EXILE



Zianon Paźniak

Exiled opposition leader Zyanon Paznyak has applied by mail to register his presidential campaign group, Central Election Commission Chairwoman Lidziya Yarmoshyna announced on 13 June. Yarmoshyna said the commission will inquire at the Constitutional Court if Paznyak's group can be registered. Under the constitution adopted in a controversial referendum in 1996, candidates running in presidential elections must "permanently live in the Republic of Belarus no less than 10 years directly before the elections." Paznyak left Belarus in April 1996 — fearing that the regime might seek to kill him — and obtained political asylum in the U.S. In the early 1990s, Paznyak led the country's most influential opposition group, the Belarusian Popular Front, which split into two factions in 1999. In the 1994 presidential polls, Paznyak obtained 12 percent of the vote. (RFE/RL Newsline, June 14)

June 15, 2001

CENTRAL COMMISSION FOR ELECTIONS REGISTERS 22 INITIATIVE GROUPS

On June 20, the Central Commission for Elections and National Referenda issued a statement saying that it has received 26 applications from groups who intend to nominate candidates for the country's September 9 presidential race. Aleksey Lyashko, director of Lipen, a Gomel-based private company; Vladimir Laptsevich, a pensioner; Alexander Batura, a businessman; and Nina Lobanova, a librarian of the Belarusian State Economic University, were denied registration due to some violations of the Electoral Code. They have the right to appeal the Commission's decision to the Supreme Court within three days. Following is a list of 22 candidates whose initiative groups received their registration certificate (the number in brackets indicates how many people will collect signatures for the nomination of the given candidate):

Sergei Antonchyk, leader of Workers' Self-Aide, an unregistered organization (1,155);

Mikhail Chigir, Former Prime Minister (1,485);

Yury Dankov, businessman, member of the Minsk City Soviet (244);

Semyon Domash, a deputy of the 13th Supreme Soviet, chair of the Grodno Initiative and the Coordination Council of Belarusian Regions (3,753);

Sergei Gaidukevich, chair of the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus [Belarusian variant of Zhirinovsky's ill-named LDP of Russia. Ed.] (2,136);

Vladimir Goncharik, chair of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (4,054);

Leonid Kalugin, executive director of Atlant, Minsk-based refrigerator plant (120);

Sergey Kalyakin, leader of the Party of Communists of Belarus (2,076);

Konstantin Kononovich, unemployed engineer (142);

Pavel Kozlovsky, former Defense Minister (1,609);

Evgeny Kryzhanovsky, director of Khristophor, Minsk-based theater (134);

Valery Levonevsky, a member of the Council of the Free Trade Union of Entrepreneurs (356);

Alexander Lukashenko, current Belarusian president (3,830);

Mikhail Marinich, Belarusian ambassador to Latvia, Estonia and Finland (806); [On June 16, Mikhail Khvostov, Belarusian Foreign Minister, granted Amb. Marinich a leave of absence. -**Ed.**]

Natalya Masherova, member of the House of Representatives (1,281);

Nikolai Mekeko, human rights activist (135);

Zyanon Paznyak, exiled leader of the Conservative Christian Party of the Belarusian Popular Front (1,429);
Valentin Semak, businessman, former KGB officer (300);
Leonid Sinitsyn, former head of the presidential administration (1,973);
Sergei Skrebets, member of the House of Representatives, lower chamber of the National Assembly [Lukashenko's hand-picked parliament. Ed.], director of BelBabayevskoye, trading house (170);
Viktor Tereshchenko, 13th Supreme Soviet deputy and director of the Minsk-based private International Institute of Management (6,069);
Alexander Yaroshuk, leader of the Trade Union of Agro-industrial Workers (1,209).

Under current law, candidates for presidency can be nominated by initiative groups of at least 100 people, who until July 21 must gather at least 100,000 signatures to put their candidate on the ballot. (Belapan, June 20)

June 18, 2001

TWO FORMER BELARUSIAN INVESTIGATORS REPORTEDLY OBTAIN ASYLUM IN U.S.

Belarusian human rights activist Aleh Volchak told journalists on 18 June that former investigators Dzmitry Petrushkevich and Aleh Sluchak have been granted political asylum in the U.S., Belapan reported. Last week, Petrushkevich and Sluchak accused top Belarusian officials of organizing a death squad and killing some 30 people, including Yury Zakharanka and Viktar Hanchar, opponents of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka (see "RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report," 12 June 2001). "We do know of Mr. Petrushkevich and Mr. Sluchak's revelations. We think that these statements give further urgency to the need to clear up the fate of the disappeared and to bring those responsible to justice," U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said on 19 June. Boucher did not comment on Petrushkevich's and Sluchak's whereabouts. (RFE/RL Newsline, June 20, 2001)

June 21, 2001

BELARUS' DEMOCRATS HAVE ONLY ONE REPRESENTATIVE IN TERRITORIAL ELECTORAL COMMISSIONS

According to the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and the "Vyasna" human rights center, the authorities included only one representative of Belarus's democratic forces in territorial (formed at the oblast and raion levels) electoral commissions, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 20 June. Belarus's democratic parties and NGOs proposed more than 600 candidates to territorial electoral commissions throughout Belarus, but the authorities agreed only to one of those candidates, in Verkhnyadzvinsk Raion of Vitsebsk Oblast. "The current executive authorities selected [for electoral commissions] a majority of those people who have already become skilled hands at falsification in previous electoral campaigns," commented Vyachaslau Siuchyk, who coordinated democratic parties' efforts to include their representatives in electoral commissions. Siuchyk added that the authorities have now begun manning voting-precinct commissions "basically on the same principles" as territorial ones. (RFE/RL Newsline, June 21, 2001)

June 25, 2001

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER URGES PROPOSING SINGLE DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

Belarusian Popular Front leader Vintsuk Vyachorka on 25 June said the main task of the Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces is to hold a congress and appoint a single democratic candidate to challenge incumbent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in the 9 September elections, Interfax reported. According to Vyachorka, such a candidate should be selected from among Syamyon Domash, Uladzimir Hancharyk, Mikhail Chyhir, and Pavel Kazlouski, who are currently gathering signatures to register for the presidential race. Vyachorka added that Domash seems to be "the most acceptable, compromise candidate." (RFE/RL Newsline, June 26, 2001)

June 26, 2001

BELARUS' GROUP OF FIVE DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES TO BECOME SIX?

Alyaksandr Yarashuk, head of the Belarusian Union of Agro-Industrial Workers, announced on 26 June that he wants to join the group of five presidential candidates supported by the Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces, Belapan reported. Yarashuk said he wants to cooperate with Mikhail Chyhir, Syamyon Domash, Uladzimir Hancharyk, Syarhey Kalyakin, and Pavel Kazlouski, adding that without fielding a single democratic candidate it is impossible to beat President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in the upcoming presidential elections. Meanwhile, the Central Election Commission on 26 June made public the rules for collecting signatures in support of aspirants seeking to register as presidential candidates, five days after the collection of signatures actually began, Interfax reported. The Charter-97 website reported on 27 June that in Vitsebsk Oblast signatures for Lukashenka are being collected by local administration officials and managers of state plants, in contravention of the electoral code. (RFE/RL Newsline, June 27, 2001)

June 27, 2001

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION PARTIES WANT NEW ELECTORAL COMMISSION

.Ten Belarusian opposition parties have said Belarus's territorial electoral commissions were formed in an illegal manner and demanded that the Central Election Commission disband them and set up new ones, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 27 June. The parties said in a memorandum that the authorities rejected virtually all candidates proposed to territorial commissions by the opposition and manned those commissions with people "who have already acquired experience in rigging the elections to the Chamber of Representatives" in 2000. The memorandum was sent to all potential presidential candidates, foreign embassies in Minsk, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). "We expect that there will be a widespread reaction [to the memorandum] -- from Belarusian society, countries neighboring with Belarus, the U.S., the EU, Russia, and so on," Vyachaslau Siuchyk of the Belarusian Popular Front said. (RFE/RL Newsline, June 28, 2001)

June 27, 2001

LUKASHENKA DECREES INCOME DECLARATIONS FOR PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFULS, FAMILIES

The Belarusian president has issued a decree obliging all presidential candidates and their "close relatives" to make declarations of their incomes and property they possess, Interfax reported on 26 June. Presidential candidates cannot be registered for the elections if they do not provide such declarations to the Central Election Commission. The notion "close relatives" includes candidates' spouses, brothers and sisters, children, grandchildren, parents, and grandparents. The commission may refuse registering a candidate if the declarations supplied by him/her and his/her close relatives include misstatements "of an essential character." (RFE/RL Newsline, June 27, 2001)

June 28, 2001

SKRUNDA RADAR REPLACEMENT SITE OPERATIONAL

The Space Forces command said that the new strategic radar site "Volga" in Baranavichy, Belarus, is now operational, the Military News Agency reported on 19 June. That facility is intended to fill the gap in Russia's early warning system that emerged after the closure of the Skrunda site in Latvia in 1998. [RFE/RL Security Watch, June 28, 2001]

CULTURE and SOCIETY

• Seventh Annual Convention of the Belarusian Language Society

The convention took place on May 20, 2001 in Miensk.

The delegates elected the honorary presidium of the convention that consisted of:

former Society chairmen Nil Hilevič and Hienadź Buraŭkin, poetess Volha Ipatava, Ms. Ludmila Dzicevič, Mr. Mikola Lavicki and Mr. John Kunstater, the first secretary of the US Embassy in Miensk.

The convention was attended by presidential candidates Paval Kazlouski and Michail Čyhir who also addressed the gathering. Mr. Kunstater, who spoke in Belarusian, emphasized the importance of the continued development of the Belarusian language and of its classical orthography — "taraskievica".

There were no representatives of the republic's government.

Written greetings were received from another presidential candidate, Siamion Domaš, from Zianon Paźniak, — chairman of the Conservative Christian Party of BPF, Ms. Ivonka Survilla — the president of the BNR council, and from Rev. Alaksandar Nadson in London.

Since 1999 the membership of the Belarusian Language Society grew to 9,000; it has established branches in all Belarusian cities, almost all rural districts, and many Belarusian diaspora centers abroad.

In its future activities, the Society is planning to focus on the transition from defending the native language to its further development, and on promoting its wider use in public life.

Dr. Aleh Trusau was re-elected chairman of the Society. Ms. Ludmila Dzicevič, Mr. Siarhiej Kručkoŭ and Ms. Alena Anisim became new deputy chairmen.

Source: *Naša Niva*, May 21, 2001

• Belarusian Translator Honored

On April 5, 2001 the German Ambassador to Belarus, Mr. Horst Winkelmann, decorated Mr. Vasil Siomucha with the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

President of Germany, Johannes Rau issued this award in appreciation of Mr. Siomucha's unique contribution to the cause of reconciliation and mutual understanding between Belarusian and German peoples.

Vasil Siomucha, a well-known literary figure and philologist, devoted much of his life to translating great creations of the German literature into Belarusian. Among his translations are the works of Friedrich Schiller, Wolfgang Göthe, Hermann Hesse, Friedrich Nitzsche and others — representing various eras and styles of German culture

Source: *Naša Słova*, April 25, 2001

• Belarusian Writers Hold Congress

Some 400 members of the Union of Belarusian Writers held a congress in Minsk on 29 May, Belapan reported. The congress elected Volha Ipatava as the union's new head. Ipatava will replace Uladzimir Nyaklyayeu, who in June 1999 decided to remain abroad after having gone to Warsaw, arguing that the authorities were fabricating a case against him on charges of financial misdeeds. Nyaklyayeu, who subsequently lived in Poland and Finland, has recently returned to Belarus. Nyaklyayeu urged the congress to adopt a resolution supporting the democratic opposition in Belarus and condemning Alyaksandr Lukashenka as an illegitimate president, but delegates refused to discuss the issue. (RFE/RL Newsline, May 30, 2001)

Pravincyja, a Magazine of Literature and Art (in Belarusian)

What is *Pravincyja*?

Pravincyja is a literary magazine intended to present the contemporary Belarusian literature and art that are produced primarily beyond Minsk, the capital of Belarus. *Pravincyja* is published in two forms: a full-length hardcopy issue and an abridged Internet edition. The publisher of both versions is the Belarusian Union, a national minority organization based in Bialystok, northeastern Poland, and led by Jauhien Vapa (Eugeniusz Wappa). The editorial team for *Pravincyja*'s first issue (No. 1-2/2000) consists of Ales' Arkus (Polacak, Belarus), Editor-in-Chief Alaksandar Maksimiuk (Bialystok, Poland), Jan Maksimiuk (Prague, Czech Republic), and Siarhiej Supa (Vilnius, Lithuania). The publication became possible through a grant from Poland's Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. "Pravincyja" (noun sing.) means "provinces" or "hinterland".

As in many other languages, the word in standard Belarusian has a rather negative connotation — it almost automatically suggests places that suffer from a measure of civilizational backwardness and intellectual narrowness, when compared with metropolises. When viewed globally, developments in provinces and capitals may fit such a pattern of assessment, but Belarus' political and cultural situation in the postwar period has produced some significant aberrations from that assessment. There are three important reasons why the word "pravincyja" — at least with regard to Belarusian literature and intellectual life should be given a more positive meaning than it has had so far. First, it became quite obvious to anybody in the 1990s that Minsk is essentially not a Belarusian but a Soviet city: its inhabitants had been heavily Sovietized as regards their everyday life and mentality, and Russified as regards their language and cultural awareness. The communist authorities of the Soviet era sustained the city's "Belarusian character" by keeping Belarusian signboards on the streets and subsidizing some cultural activities based on national traditions — as a sort of makeup for their denationalizing policies. Perhaps the most important contribution of Belarus' Soviet-era regime to maintaining the Belarusian national identity distinct from the Russian one was to provide financial support to literature in the mother tongue. Belarusian writers, of course, had to pay the price for that support. Most Belarusian poetry and prose of the Soviet period turned out to be only insipid and dreary exercises in political propaganda, and now those works are mercifully sinking into oblivion in musty libraries. Fortunately, despite the unrelenting censorship and ideological control, some Belarusian authors were able to produce books that continue to make an impression on the younger generations that reached their intellectual maturity after the collapse of the Soviet Union. What is peculiar about Belarusian literature is the fact that almost all of its authors were born outside Minsk — somewhere in the provinces — and drew on their "provincial experience" to make their names in belles lettres. Minsk was draining the provinces not only of a crude workforce but also from artistic talent. Minsk was feeding on the creative resources of the provinces but has not elicited virtually anything of literary importance from those born, brought up, and educated among its drab concrete apartment blocks. Since all of Belarus' publishing houses and literary magazines were located in Minsk, it was possible to conceal the capital's own impotence and sterility in national literature for quite a long time.

When the regime of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in the mid-1990s initiated its nationally and culturally debilitating policies of re-Sovietization and re-Russification in a suicidal bid to revive the defunct Soviet empire under the name of a "Slavic union", Minsk finally became what it had painfully aspired to be for some 50 years — a nowhere place with all the inferiority complexes of a Russian provincial city vis-a-vis Moscow. Some of the most despairing Belarusian intellectuals even proposed that the Belarusian capital be moved from Minsk to a provincial town (for example, Navahradak) in order to prevent the concrete Moloch from devouring the "real Belarus", which is purportedly embodied in provincial and country life. True or not, it should, however, be noted that many Belarusian regions (especially those in the country's west and north) may be closer to "the heart of Belarusianness" than Minsk in the sense that their residents still speak Belarusian as well as follow some native traditions and customs in their everyday life. Belarusian intellectuals live in Minsk as they would in a foreign country.

Minsk philosopher Valancin Akudovic has suggested that today's Belarus be called the Archipelago of Belarus, arguing that on the political map of the Republic of Belarus the places where people speak

Belarusian, develop Belarusian culture, or simply love their Belarusian Fatherland, form merely an archipelago of isles and islets in the sea of Russian language and culture. Well, if this gloomy metaphor fits the real situation, then of course the notion of Belarusian provincialism must be radically revised, at least because of its quantitative if not qualitative share in the area of the national archipelago.

Second, the literary life in Belarusian provinces has experienced a sort of boom following the collapse of the USSR and subsequently that of the centralized system of allocating money and paper for the production of books in Belarusian. Many independent publishing initiatives appeared at the local level in the 1990s, and provincial publishers and authors have gradually begun to learn how to look for money for their books among non-state and private sponsors. Poet Ales' Arkus from Polacak, along with his colleagues, set up the Association of Free Writers and launched the magazine "Kalossie" in an attempt to coordinate the literary efforts of the provinces and provide a rostrum for disseminating the writings and ideas of those choosing to ignore the lines to Minsk publishing houses and literary periodicals. Belarus saw a group of interesting authors who were not only born outside Minsk (which is a norm in Belarusian literature), but also published outside Minsk and did not intend to move to Minsk. We may call this development a provincial literary revolt.

Third, there is quite an unusual Belarusian region in Poland's Podlasie Province (with Bialystok as the main city). According to different estimates, the Bialystok region, which stretches along the Polish-Belarusian border for some 200 kilometers, is inhabited by 100,000 to 250,000 ethnic Belarusians, who during the past half century managed to emancipate themselves from their disheartening status of peasant aborigines with hardly any historical memory to become a community with, more or less, a clearly defined Belarusian identity. Particularly notable is that the Polish Belarusians accomplished their ethnic transformation owing to exclusively their own efforts and resources. The authorities of the Belarusian SSR, which were working very hard to denationalize and Sovietize the main bulk of Belarusians, barred their citizens from any wider contacts with Poland's Belarusian minority. They simply wanted to prevent the Soviet Belarusians from grasping that there may be a somewhat different way of national development for them besides Russification. Under such circumstances, Poland's Belarusians could not even hope for any moral — let alone material support from Soviet Belarus. The socioeconomic emancipation of Polish Belarusians has also given rise to literary pursuits by some three dozen Belarusian authors in Poland. The Belarusian-language literature in Poland may not be an event of international significance, but it is an important component of the Belarusian minority's various activities and endeavors as well as a clear sign of its intellectual maturity and sophistication. Two literary magazines were launched by two Belarusian writers of the older generation at the turn of the century, including one published in half a dozen European languages (no kidding!). Among other Belarusian provinces, Poland's Bialystok region is by far the most dynamic in terms of the institutionalization of Belarusian activities. Some 4,000 children are still taught the Belarusian language at schools in the region, there are Belarusian programs on local public radio and television, a full-time Belarusian-language radio station in Bialystok (believe it or not, the only Belarusian-language radio station on ethnic-Belarusian territory), and half a dozen minority organizations that fully enjoy the atmosphere of political freedom and pluralism in Poland, quarreling with one another much more often than collaborating.

As some say, the Bialystok region is a "Belarus in itself and for itself" (while being simultaneously part of Poland). *Pravincyja* is a literary project of the younger generation of Polish Belarusians who refused to build socialism under General Wojciech Jaruzelski's rule and tried to ruin it jointly with their Polish colleagues. This generation had a lot of work to do in the early 1990s, when the freshly acquired democracy as well as the state course toward the European Union opened many possibilities (including job vacancies) for developing and deepening the ethnic identity of Poland's Belarusian community. After a long string of political, economic, cultural, and educational projects within the Belarusian minority, the turn finally came to literature. The Polish-Belarusian border remains no less sealed than it was 10, or 20, or 50 years ago — but the Internet miraculously helps us contact inhabitants of the Belarusian Archipelago across the land and sea frontiers and share literary ideas and texts with them.

Source: Web-site **http://pravincyja.republika.pl**

Five Years of the People's University

People's University was established in 1996 as an independent program of the international civic association "The Belarusian Perspective". Its aim was to create a nongovernmental and nonparty system of offering citizens of Belarus information on topical issues of the civic, political and socioeconomic life of the country.

Another important task of the program is to prepare and educate a Belarusian democratic elite such as managers and activists of political parties and civic organizations. The emphasis was placed on educational activities in the country's regions, outside of the capital Minsk.

The University began its work by offering lectures to any citizen of Belarus free of charge - first in larger regional cities, then in larger economic centers (Salihorsk, Babrujsk, Pinsk, Novapolacak, etc.), and eventually mainly in district centers. In 2000-2001 the University offered instruction in Asipovicy, Baranavicy, Biaroza, Vaukavysk, Zodzina, Zlobin and Vorsa. In five years of its existence this program of independent education spread to 25 Belarusian cities, and the number of its graduates exceeded 1,000.

The People's University continues the tradition of Vilnia University students, who in 1817 founded the Association of Philomaths (lovers of learning) that provided general enlightenment and promoted the Belarusian national idea. Today, those who have attended People's University lectures, usually form local branches of the Association of Philomaths in order to disseminate the obtained knowledge and ideas to as many people as possible.

The People's University is now headed by Andrej Sannikau who first formulated its concept and initiated the creation of an independent education system. Valancin Holubieu is the vice-president, and Alaksiej Chadyka the executive director. The lecturers include well-known scholars and civic leaders: economists Uladzimir Kulazanka, Uladzimir Tarasau, Ludmila Hraznova and Jaraslau Ramancuk, professors Ivan Nikitcanka and Jury Chadyka, historian Valancin Holubieu, philosophers Uladzimir Padhol, Uladzimir Rouda and others.

The University is an apolitical structure whose main goal is to offer the citizens of Belarus objective and independent information in the fields of economics, history, culture, politics and ecology.

With the gradual entrenchment of an authoritarian regime in Belarus, the People's University's work increasingly resembles that of the so-called "flying universities" in neighboring Poland during the martial-law regime of Gen. Jaruzelski. The attitude of the authorities toward citizens' attempts to exchange independent information is also similar: they deny the use of facilities for university lectures, intimidate the students, officially "recommend" not to attend lectures and even dismiss some students from their jobs.

The future fate of the People's University very much depends on the general situation in Belarus. If the country enters the path to democracy and respect for human rights, then the People's University may eventually be supported by the state, as has happened in many other countries.

Source: *Belarusian Perspective* # 4, May 2001.

HUMAN RIGHTS

NEW RESTRICTION ON NON-STATE ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS — The Belarusian government is resorting to extreme measures to make sure that "the ideologists of the Belarusian opposition, funded by their foreign patrons, will fail to weaken the Belarusian statehood and undermine the state system." The Belarusian Cabinet of Ministers ruled that from June 1, 2001, the People's University and other non-state academic institutions will have to obtain a special permission from the authorities to hold their educational seminars or lectures. (Charter 97, April 13)

NON-ORTHODOX GROUPS GIVEN DEADLINE TO CHANGE JURIDICAL ADDRESS — Following the changes to the Belarusian Housing Code adopted in 1999, religious organizations whose juridical address is a private apartment have until June 1, 2001, to find an alternative juridical address and re-register if they want to preserve their legal status and avoid fines, reported Belapan. The organizations registered at private addresses that have a separate entrance in a block of apartments or at private houses are not required to re-register. Oleg Gulak, acting chairman of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, told Keston that the move was part of a targeted campaign to put pressure on non-Orthodox religious groups. Gulak does not know how many of the 3,000 registered religious groups were affected by the move, but believes that more than half might have registration at private addresses. He pointed out that by contrast, the Orthodox Church has no such problems because all Orthodox communities have their own buildings. In his opinion, it would be very difficult for religious group to find alternative juridical addresses.

The League notes that in 2000, Alexander Lukashenka signed Decree No. 36, which required permission from local authorities each time a religious organization wished to hold a religious meeting or service in a property not designed for religious use. Many Protestant churches without their own buildings have had to halt public services. In addition to the changes to the housing code and the de facto ban on religious meetings outside dedicated religious premises, the government is also planning to amend the country's law on religion. The draft is being worked out in secrecy and would not be made public until it is discussed at the next session of parliament, due to convene in the spring. (Keston, Belapan, April 6, 8)

MINSK AUTHORITIES BAN TRADE UNION'S PROTESTS — Faced with mounting public protests, the regime continues to curtail the rights of assembly, which is guaranteed by Art. 40 of the Belarusian Constitution. The Minsk City Council prohibited the Trade Union of Workers of the Agricultural Machinery Industry from holding a series of pickets in the Belarusian capital, arguing that it will threatened public safety, reported Belarusskaya delovaya gazeta, an independent newspaper. With demonstrations remaining the major vehicle for public expression against government policies, the workers wanted to demand from the authorities to stop violations of their rights and improve deteriorating living conditions in the country. On April 18, the Union re-applied for the permission to carry out the action. In case of refusal, the organizers is to appeal the Council's decision in court. By banning the protests the authorities deliberately provoke civil disobedience, they said. Last year, quoting suppression of trade union movements and workers rights, as well as other human rights, the U.S. suspended the country's benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences (See Belarus Update Vol. 3, No. 28-29). (Belarusskaya delovaya gazeta, April 19)

BELARUSIAN TRADE UNIONIST ON HUNGER STRIKE — Alena Zakhozhaya, a Belarusian Free Trade Union (BFTU) activist at the Belshyna state-run tire factory in Babruysk, has been on a hunger strike for 13 days, demanding that the factory management provide the BFTU factory branch she heads with a legal address, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 14 May. A formal address is necessary for legally pursuing the activities of a trade union organization. Zakhozhaya is continuing her protest without leaving her workplace. Independent trade union activist Syarhey Antonchyk on 14 May met with Ivan Bambiza, head of the Belnaftakhim State Concern, to which Babruysk's Belshyna is subordinate. "Bambiza said: 'Let Zakozhnaya obtain the legal address [she needs] by pitching a tent in front of Belshyna.' In short, it was a cynical answer," Antonchyk told RFE/RL. (RFE/RL Newsline, May 15, 2001)

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE DENIES REGISTRATION TO LEGAL AID ASSOCIATION — The Public Legal Aid Association, headed by Oleg Volchek, was denied registration by the Belarusian Ministry of Justice on the pretext that a public association is not generally allowed to provide legal advice, that the organization has an inappropriate name and that its goals and activities do not comply with the law. The case is particularly telling because in a country where security forces continue to arbitrarily arrest and detain citizens; where the investigators routinely fail to inform detainees of their rights and conduct preliminary interrogations without giving detainees an opportunity to consult counsel; where the information gained during the preliminary interrogations is often used against the defendant in court; where access by family members to those detained is restricted severely in practice; and where defense attorneys, when appointed by the State, are subordinate to the executive branch, a human rights organizations is a last resort for those whose rights are violated. By denying registration to the Public Legal Aid Association the regime once again demonstrates its disrespect of fundamental civil liberties, including freedom of association, which is guarantied by the Art. 36 of the Belarusian Constitution.

The League also notes that in claiming that a public association cannot provide legal advice to the population, the Belarusian authorities are violating the 1998 "Defenders' Resolution" of the General Assembly, which affirms the right of individuals or groups to provide human rights protection. The failure to register the Public Legal Aid Association is a violation of the commitments undertaken by Belarus in signing the 1992 OSCE Copenhagen Agreement regarding freedom of association. (Charter 97; ILHR May 17)

PROMINENT PROFESSORS SENTENCED TO EIGHT YEARS IN PRISON FOR BRIBERY — On June 18, the Military Collegium [a panel of judges dealing with high ranking officers, including those in the reserves] of the Belarusian Supreme Court sentenced Yuri Bandazhevsky, rector of the Gomel State Medical Institute, and his deputy, Vladimir Revkov, each to eight years in a hard-labor colony with confiscation of property under Art. 430, par. 2 of the Belarusian Penal Code for taking bribes from college applicants. Both scientists were barred from holding executive positions within 5 years after serving the prison term. Revkov was also deprived of a military rank of Lieutenant-Colonel of Medical Troops in Reserve.

Prof. Bandazhevsky was brought to the final court hearing, which lasted about 15 minutes, by border guards, who kept him in custody since June 10, when he was detained while allegedly attempting to illegally cross the Belarusian-Ukrainian border at the Novaya Guta crossing point under the name of Ukrainian national Ivan Kryachkov. Three Ukrainian citizens, who accompanied him in two cars, are still

held in custody. The Ukrainian Embassy in Minsk has not made any efforts to help them. Bandazhevsky's wife, Galina, told journalists in Gomel that her husband fell victim to a well-prepared provocation, carried out by the secret services.

Bribe-taking in exchange for college admission is common in the post-Soviet states, where university employees must survive on small salaries and often take advantage of their positions. Established academics are rarely touched by such allegations, however. The criminal case against Bandazhevsky and Prof. Vladimir Revkov, his former deputy, who have been studying radiation problems, was initiated in July 1999. Revkov was the first one to be arrested; Bandazhevsky was charged on the basis of Revkov's testimony, which the former deputy rector later retracted. The Belarusian human rights activists say the case against two prominent radiation specialists is connected to their frequent public criticism of the Lukashenko government's policy in the areas that were contaminated as a result of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster. The European Union's leadership announced its decision to consider Prof. Bandazhevsky a prisoner of conscience. (ILHR, Belarus Update, June 26, 2001)

BELARUS & the WORLD

OSCE GROUP IN BELARUS TO CONTINUE COOPERATION WITH ELECTION MONITORS — Hans Georg Wieck, head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Minsk, reaffirmed on 11 April that his group is going to cooperate with domestic observers in this year's Belarusian presidential elections, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Wieck told the Consultative Council of Opposition Political Parties that neither Belarusian legislation nor Belarus's international accords prohibit the OSCE group from such cooperation. Wieck's statement appears to be in response to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's threats the previous day to prevent the West from installing an independent election monitoring system in Belarus (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 10 and 11 April 2001). According to many commentators, Lukashenka's recent decree on control over foreign gratuitous assistance to Belarus also intends to thwart the OSCE's efforts to form an efficient election monitoring system in the country. (RFE/RL Newsline, April 12, 2001)

RUSSIAN DEFENSE MINISTER IN MINSK — Sergei Ivanov arrived in Minsk on 16 April for two days of talks with Belarusian officials on military cooperation, ITAR-TASS reported. Ivanov said on his arrival that he will discuss issues that will "fill the military part of the Russia-Belarus Union Treaty with substance." He said such topics include the drafting of a military doctrine for the union and the harmonization of Russian and Belarusian legislation regarding defense issues. Ivanov said such topics should help develop the idea of a "regional military group of the union state." A meeting of the joint board of the Russian and Belarusian defense ministries is to be held on 17 April. Ivanov is to meet with his Belarusian counterpart Leonid Maltsev during his visit. (RFE/RL Newsline, April 17, 2001)

OSCE REJECTS MINSK'S SPY ALLEGATIONS — The OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Minsk rejected allegations on 17 April that it is recruiting spies to work as election monitors, Reuters reported. In a statement, the OSCE office said its training programs "were and continue to be transparent and have nothing to do with espionage or political militancy." The espionage charge was made by Leonid Yerin, the head of Belarus's Committee for State Security, or KGB. The OSCE plans to put in place a total of some 14,000 observers in order to monitor voting at each polling station during the Belarusian presidential elections, which are scheduled to be held later this year. (RFE/RL Newsline, April 18, 2001)

OSCE OFFICIAL CANCELS VISIT TO BELARUS — Freimut Duve, the head of media freedom at the OSCE, canceled his trip to Belarus after Minsk denied a visa to his adviser, U.S. diplomat Diana Moxhay, AP reported on 24 April. Duve argued that Belarus -- an OSCE member -- does not have the right to dictate the composition of the delegation, which was planning to investigate press freedom. Duve said he wants to set a precedent for all 55 OSCE members that OSCE delegations should be independent of outside interference. Duve added that Belarusian officials did not give a reason for denying the visa to his adviser. Duve told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service the same day that his adviser had been given a Belarusian visa one month ago for a visit that was subsequently postponed. (RFE/RL Newsline, April 25, 2001)

OSCE MISSION IN MINSK REJECTS ANTIGOVERNMENT ACTIVITY CHARGES — The OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Minsk on 22 May rejected as "unjustified" Belarusian Foreign Minister Mikhail Khvastou's accusation that the group is conducting "destructive" activities in the country (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 18 May 2001), Belapan reported. The group also said the recent charge by KGB spokesman Fyodar Kotau that OSCE mission head Hans Georg Wieck is seeking to oust President Alyaksandr Lukashenka (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 22 May 2001) aims to discredit the OSCE mission in the eyes of the Belarusian public. "In the light of consultations held with the [OSCE] chairman in office on 18 May 2001, the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group is quite ready to continue cooperation with the [Belarusian] government in support of the democratic transformation process of the country," the group noted. (RFE/RL Newsline, May 23, 2001)

OSCE HOSTS WORKSHOP ON MEDIA FREEDOM WITH BELARUSIAN JOURNALISTS — On May 31, Freimut Duve, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, hosted a public workshop on media freedom with Belarusian journalists in Vienna. Participants included Zhanna Litvina, president of the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ); Vladimir Glod and Eduard Melnikov, BAJ's vice-presidents; Mikhail Pastukhov, a former Constitutional Court judge and now the director of the Media Defense Center of the BAJ; media expert Yuri Toporashev; Sergei Zayats, correspondent of Interfax news agency; Ludmila Kovaleva, representative of the Belarusian Television and Radio Company (BTR), Vladimir Lebedik, deputy editor-in-chief of Sovetskaya Belorussiya, state-owned newspaper, and an official of the State Press Committee. (Belaruskaya Delovaya Gazeta reported that Duve made a decision to invite the representatives of the state-controlled media to give the regime a lesson on democracy.) The workshop was aimed at facilitating an exchange of views with OSCE-participating States and European journalists. The representatives of independent media told the gathering that the pressure on the them is growing, and many editors expect even harsher restrictions during the electoral campaign this fall. "Belarus is a European country. Belarusian journalists must build up the future of their country with their own hands. This is necessary in order to avoid the repeat of the Yugoslavian situation, where Slobodan Milosevic was destroying his country's future," Duve commented to reporters on the results of the meeting. [Freimut Duve had to cancel his long-scheduled visit to Minsk at the end of April, because the Lukashenka government denied a visa to Diana Moxhay, Duve's senior adviser on Belarus, who was to accompany him. Duve viewed this decision as additional evidence of the deteriorating situation regarding the media in the country and the authori-

ties' unwillingness to cooperate with the OSCE.-Ed.]. (OSCE, Belaruskaya Delovaya Gazeta, May 28- June 1)

CIS HEAD OF STATES HOLD SUMMIT IN MINSK — The meeting of the CIS heads of state in Minsk on 1 June was long on ceremony but short on substance, an RFE/RL special correspondent reported. Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed hope that efforts to establish a free-trade zone within the CIS would soon prove successful. "I think a free-trade zone practically has almost been formed. The Russian Federation has signed bilateral agreements with all CIS states. The question remains unresolved only with Ukraine," Putin told journalists. But Ukrainian Foreign Minister Anatoliy Zlenko said the summit made no substantial progress on the establishment of a CIS free-trade zone, Interfax reported on 1 June. Zlenko noted that Ukraine has met all obligations required to join a CIS free-trade zone. Several leaders noted that the advantage of CIS summits is mainly in providing a venue for bilateral and trilateral meetings within a short period of time and with minimal costs. (RFE/RL Newsline, June 4, 2001)

BELARUSIAN, RUSSIAN, UKRAINIAN LEGISLATORS SET UP INTERPARLIAMENTARY GROUP — The Parliamentary Assembly of the Russia-Belarus Union on 4 June gathered for a two-day session in Hrodna, western Belarus. The session was attended by Ukrainian lawmakers. Belarusian, Russian, and Ukrainian lawmakers set up an interparliamentary deputy association called For the Union of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia (ZUBR). ZUBR's declared goals include "the restoration of the unity of the Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian people" and the consolidation of efforts toward the creation of a union of the three Slavic nations, Belapan reported. Meanwhile, Russian State Duma Speaker Gennadii Seleznev told journalists in Hrodna that plans to merge Russia and Belarus into a single state face strong resistance from some "executive and political structures" and will take a long time to implement. Several dozen young people in Hrodna protested the Belarusian-Russian integration, shouting "Shame!" and "Independence!" at deputies leaving the session hall. (RFE/RL Newsline, June 5, 2001)

WORLD BANK APPROVES $22.6 MILLION LOAN TO BELARUS — The World Bank on 5 June approved a $22.6 million loan to Belarus to finance the upgrading of heating systems, thermal insulation, and lighting in more than 450 schools, hospitals, orphanages, and homes for the elderly and the disabled, Belapan reported. "The objective is to make the environment of these people more comfortable, with facilities that keep their inhabitants warm in the winter and provide better lighting, while saving energy," Eric Peterson from the World Bank commented. This is the bank's first loan to Belarus since 1994, when President Alyaksandr Lukashenka blocked reforms in such areas as agriculture, privatization, trade, and banking. In 1997, the bank signed a memorandum with Belarus, making its further loans dependent on the liberalization of the Belarusian ruble exchange rate. Belarus liberalized the exchange rate of its currency last fall. (RFE/RL Newsline, June 7, 2001)

EBRD THREATENS TO BREAK TIES WITH BELARUS IF ELECTIONS ARE UNDEMOCRATIC — The European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has threatened to stop its loans to Belarus if the 9 September presidential elections fail to meet democratic standards, "Neue Zuercher Zeitung" reported on 28 June. Speaking to PACE in Strasbourg on 27 June, EBRD President Jean Lemierre said the bank will be closely watching developments in Belarus's election campaign. Lemierre stressed that should international observers, including those from the OSCE, conclude that the ballot is unfair, the EBRD will completely break its ties with Belarus. The current session of PACE is attended by two Belarusian delegations with guest status: one from the National Assembly and the other from the opposition Supreme Soviet. (RFE/RL Newsline, June 28, 2001)

LUKASHENKO LEAVES MOSCOW WITHOUT PUTIN'S ENDORSEMENT — On June 20, during a meeting in Kremlin, Alexander Lukashenko appealed to Russian president Vladimir Putin to back his re-election bid. Journalists in Minsk and Moscow are now hinting that Lukashenko has been unnerved by PUTIN'S refusal so far to back his re-election drive and by the time allotted by Russian television to the other candidates in the race. "Do Not Forget To Switch off the television -- Lukashenko Will Ask Putin to Rein in Russia's channels" during the coverage of the Belarusian ballot, Vremya Novostei, a Russian daily, quipped in a headline [referring to the warning posted on TV screens at the end of the broadcast day. **Ed.**]. According to local observers, the Belarusian Embassy in Moscow was ordered to begin preparing Lukashenko's visit immediately after ORT aired programs featuring the five leading opposition candidates (Mikhail Chigir, Pavel Kozlovsky, Vladimir Goncharik, Semyon Domash, and Sergey Kalyakin), the newspaper said.

But government sources in Moscow said that amid reports that Lukashenko may be linked to the disappearance of his prominent political opponents and journalist Dmitry Zavadsky, the Belarusian leader left Moscow without winning PUTIN'S endorsement of his bid for re-election in September. "The Russian government has said several times that it has no intention of getting involved in the internal affairs of Belarus," RIA Novosti, the Russian state-run news agency, reported on June 20. "At the same time, Moscow thinks that these elections should not lead to the further isolation of Belarus, but instead create the conditions for the country's rapid integration into Europe," the agency said.

Hours before his departure from Moscow, Lukashenko vehemently denied that he had asked Putin for an endorsement, or that he was keen to win favorable coverage of the campaign from Russian television. "I have never discussed the election campaign with anyone before," Lukashenko told reporters before meeting on June 21 with Mikhail Gorbachev, former Soviet president. "The only thing we discussed with Putin was the question of Russia and other former Soviet states sending election observers," he said. "I do not need anyone's support in the elections, except for the Belarusian people's," he added.

"President Lukashenko was poorly received -- and he may be completely banished" by the Russian political establishment, Kommersant Daily, a Russian independent newspaper, said in a banner headline. "After a meeting with Vladimir Putin, Lukashenko must have understood that Moscow is in no hurry to provide him support," the paper added. Other observers noted that the Putin administration, while keen to distance itself from the scandals surrounding Lukashenko's presidency, understands that the Belarusian leader remains the election front-runner.

"The Russian factor will play the deciding role in the Belarus elections," reported Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Russian newspaper. The paper suggested that the Kremlin is studying the prospects of backing Natalya Masherova, the daughter of Peter Masherov, a prominent Communist Party boss who was killed in a traffic accident. She is seen as the most likely candidate to slip into a second-round runoff against Lukashenko, although her political and economic views are not entirely clear. (RIA Novosti/ Vremya Novostei/ Kommersant Daily/ Nezavisimaya Gazeta, June 20-21)

OSCE ENVOYS END FACT-FINDING TRIP TO BELARUS — Uta Zapf of Germany and Urban Alin of Sweden, members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's working group on Belarus, wound up their three-day visit to Belarus on 2

July. Zapf and Urban studied the political situation in the country, meeting with government officials, opposition figures, media representatives, and diplomats from foreign embassies in Minsk. They are to deliver a report to the Credentials Commission of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. This week the commission is scheduled to consider which body -- the opposition Supreme Soviet or the official Chamber of Representatives -- has the right to represent Belarus in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. Zapf told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service that she and Alin will propose that the current policy of "an empty chair" --neither the Supreme Soviet nor the Chamber of Representatives represents Belarus -- be maintained at least until the September presidential elections in the country. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 3, 2001)

LETTERS

Responses from the White House

Thank you for letting me know your views and for your kind words. I appreciate learning what is on the minds of individual Americans across the country, and I value your input.

I am gratified to know that I can count on your support as we work to bring our Nation together and focus on so many issues of concern to Americans.

George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, USA

•••

I am writing on behalf of Vice President Dick Cheney to acknowledge receipt of your letter and the Winter 2000-2001 issue of the *Belarusian Review.*

The Vice President appreciated hearing from you, and will share the material with members of his policy staff. Thank you for taking the time to write.

Cecelia Boyer
Special Assistant to the Vice President for Correspondence
Office of the Vice President
Washington, USA

•••

Thank you so much for your kind letter of February 7, 2001. I appreciate the time you took to write and forward the information on Belarus. Should the issue arise, I'll keep your comments in mind.

Again, thanks for writing.

Ari Fleischer
Press Secretary
The White House
Washington, USA

Belarusians Will Fight Their Own Battles

I just received a copy of your spring issue of *Belarusian Review.*

Thank you very much for sending this. I read it today with a great deal of interest. Particularly interesting -- the piece on Belarusian-Russian relations ("Russian-Belarusian Minuet"). Very acute analysis, I thought, and I agree with the author completely. I remember last year reading republican media coverage on the last Moscow summit, at which, as I recall, Putin went out of his way to put Lukashenka in his place. As I recall, Putin made a point of saying that Belarus is "traveling another road" from Russia.

I also read with great sorrow the Charter-97 piece ("Who Will Be Responsible for the Missing Ones?") on the KGB "leaks" with regard to the "disappearances" of key opposition leaders, as well as the immensely talented and courageous Zavadskiy. This was an especially important piece to print, particularly at this time.

However, I really must say that I was very upset with the essay ("The Childhood of a Nation") that strived to convince the readership that the average citizen of Belarus is, in essence, a "child." I think this type of pseudo-cultural view is very dangerous, very condescending and completely ignores the incredible explosion of voluntary associations and non-govermental organizations springing up all over the Republic. The citizens of Belarus are hardly "children" and they will, of course, fight their own battles in their own way and in their own time. They will, of course, actively forge their own futures, in spite of the very substantial constraints and obstacles. Where some apparently see "weakness," I see "strength."

Bill Graves, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Humanities and International Studies
Bryant College
Smithfield, Rhode Island, USA

Annual subscription rate for 2001: $45 for individuals, $65 for institutions
Make your check or money order in U.S. funds payable to:
Belarusian Review and mail to: BR, P.O. Box 10353, Torrance, CA 90505, USA

Annual subscription rates in Europe are:
1000 Kc in Czech Republic, 45 CHF in Switzerland, 50 DM in Germany, 200 FRF in France
18 GBP in United Kingdom, or EUR 28
Make your check or money order in these currencies payable to:
Spolek SKARYNA (Belarusian Review), Malešická 553/65
108 00 Praha 10, Czech Republic